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One over

By ALLAN SEAGER

American Rhodes Scholar at Oxford 1931-4
Professor of English at Michigan University

DURING my first week at Oxford I decided not to go out for any sports in the fall, or Michaelmas, term. My college offered Rugby, soccer, field hockey and something referred to as "the boats." I had never done any of these. They were all outdoor sports, and outdoors was where it was raining. For a fee I could also have joined a team of chaps who trotted informally through the dripping countryside in mild competition with a group from another college.

The rain discouraged me, however. I got soggy enough walking to lectures. The Michaelmas term seemed a good time to lie in front of a fire and get a good start on my reading.

I did this. I read heavily, but after three weeks I noticed a nervousness coming over me. And after the fourth week I knew what it was. I had been getting up every half hour to look out of the window.

Now, there was nothing to look at out of my window but the college coal pile and beyond it a fifteen-foot wall topped with broken glass to keep students from climbing in after midnight. I was looking for a girl. I had got used to having dates at home, but, after a day or two of scrutiny, I could tell that I was not likely to see one poised like a mountain goat on top of the coal.

I had won a Rhodes scholarship because I was the only man at the state examination who had worn a stiff collar—an Arrow, I believe. I did not wear it to Oxford. Instead I bought shirts with what we used to call bootlegger (tab) collars, a tweed jacket, and grey flannel "bags." Not knowing that Americans move differently from the English—looser, somehow—and that you can identify one as far as you can see him, I believed my attire made me indistinguishable from an Old Etonian, and I had peeped at the English girls in the lecture halls, thinking that I had at least an even start with the Englishmen. I was appalled at what I saw.

The English girls wore rugged tweeds full of sticks of heather and twigs of gorse that stank in the wet weather, and they had big, frightening muscles in their legs from bike riding. A beautiful American girl would, I thought, be glad to make the acquaintance of a compatriot because of her loneliness.

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the eight

Drawings by
RONALD SEARLE

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I spotted an American girl in one of my lectures and she was beautiful.

I said, " I wonder if you would care to drink sherry with me this afternoon and bring a friend." I didn't want her friend, but the university had ruled that young women could visit young men's rooms only in pairs.

" I don't think so," she said coldly.

" Tea, perhaps? "

" No."

" Ah, milk? "

She walked out.

I didn't know then that American girls in Oxford don't want to meet Americans; they want to meet Englishmen.

After this rebuff I might have lingered before my fire until spring in a dangerous inertia, dangerous because the elements of English diet are extremely reluctant to move without help after you have ingested them. But I was asked to go on the river. I was flattered to be asked, and I went.

The river is the Thames, but it is mysteriously called the Isis where it flows through Oxford, and the way to it is past the walled garden where Lewis Carroll, himself an admirer of girls—but girls rather younger than those who interested me—wrote *Alice in Wonderland* while he was a don at Christ Church. Then you go down a long alley under tremendous elms and you come to the college barges. They are houseboats, really, and they never go any place. They are moored tight to the bank and are used as dressing-rooms. They are painted white, highly ornamented with coloured mouldings, and they made a pretty sight lined up along the riverbank.

The only rowing I had done was to pull a flat-bottomed rowing-boat over the weed beds of small lakes after bass. I was not the only novice, however, and we all had to put up with two or three days of " we call this an oar " kind of instruction before they let us sit down and try to put our backs into it. The president of the Boat Club, Tom Smith, was the coach. There was no professional coaching in any sport—there still isn't—except that the varsity cricketers and swimmers had professionals come to look at them occasionally during the season. Tom Smith told me I might make a No. 6, and he gave me politely to know that Six was supposed to move a lot of water. At twelve stone nine I was the biggest man in the boat and, as I found out later, in the college.

At my college we were lucky. We began the season in a proper shell no thicker than a cigar box. I saw an unfortunate

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youth step right through it into the river because he had not set his foot exactly on the keel when he climbed in. We also had movable seats on little wheels and swivel rowlocks.

I kept hearing a saying: "English rowing is ten years behind the times; Cambridge rowing is twenty years behind the times. Oxford rowing is forty years behind the times."

The varsity boat and those of some of the colleges began training exactly as their forefathers had done when Victoria was a young queen. In the first weeks of the season the varsity eight swung grandly down the river in a craft that resembled the war canoe of some obscure tribe. It was heavy enough for the open sea. It had board seats and the rowlocks were merely two straight pegs you laid the oars between. A month's workouts in this scow certainly preserved tradition, but it also gave a man a set of boils as big as walnuts. A varsity oarsman spent more time on his feet than a cop, and when he sat down he bellowed. With such a fine start, the boils lasted all season even after the varsity shifted to the shell they would use against Cambridge. At my college, Oriel, we avoided all this pain. Daringly unorthodox, we rowed the Jesus style.

The Jesus style was developed by a man named Steve Fairbairn. Succinctly put, it was "blade form." This meant that if your oar blade was right, nothing else mattered. Opposed to this was the practice of the varsity, all the other colleges and, I believe, American crews, called "body form," which meant that if your body was correctly poised, the blade had to be right.

A body-form crew was coached right down to its fingernails. You were supposed to keep a straight back, to stare perpetually at the fifth or sixth cervical vertebra of the man in front of you and never move your head. A body-form crew is impressive to watch. The muscular decorum makes its members look virtuous and clean-limbed. Perhaps this is its own reward, for a blade-form crew, rowing with backs bending comfortably and gandering around at the blades, may look raffish and sloppy but probably is going as fast as the body-form boys.

We trained all the fall into December. It was mostly just rowing. The Thames is a canal with locks all the way to London, and if we were taking a long paddle, say eight or ten miles, we had to pass Iffley lock when we went one way and Osney lock when we went the other. I can remember sitting in Osney lock one dark afternoon, waiting for it to fill, with ice forming on the oars and flakes of snow as big as goose feathers wetting the back of my skimpy little shirt, and it was no consolation to remember that the Miller's Wife in *The Canterbury Tales* had probably lived within a furlong.

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On short days when we stayed within Iffley lock we were coached by Tom Smith riding a bicycle beside us on the towpath. I doubt if we rowed as much as Washington or Yale. There was no other training. Beer was believed strengthening; gin would keep coxswains small. No one spoke of cigarettes at all. As green as I was, I didn't know whether I was in shape or not, but it didn't make much difference, because term ended about the middle of December and I took off for six weeks in Paris.

The Bump Races come in two sets, late in January and early in May. They are rowed for six days, Thursday through Saturday and Monday through Wednesday. The colloquial name for the January races is Toggers; the formal one, Torpids; but no one could tell me why. The May races are called Eights, and they are quite social. If you have a girl, you bring her, give her luncheons of hock and lobster mayonnaise and she sits on the top of your barge to watch you sweat. Toggers are grimmer because January is grimmer.

Bump races are examples of much made of little. The Thames is a small river at Oxford. There were about twenty-five rowing colleges, and each college put two boats in the river, the larger colleges, like Balliol, three, sometimes four, so there were perhaps sixty in all. You could not row sixty eight-oared shells abreast

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on the Isis, so they start one behind another and chase the one in front.

Small stakes are driven into the bank sixty feet apart. To each stake a rope sixty feet long is fixed. The cox holds the other end and lets the boat drift until it is taut. Each boat has a starter. Five minutes before time all the starters gather at a little brass cannon in a hayfield to synchronise their stopwatches with a chronometer. Then they come back and stand on the bank beside their boats saying, "Two minutes gone. Three minutes gone," to the yawning oarsmen in the river below.

In the last minute they count off the quarters, and finally, "10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, come forward, are you ready?" and *Bang!* goes the little brass cannon.

The college bargeman gives you a hell of a shove with a boat-hook and away you go, the cox howling the beat at about fifty strokes a minute. It is very common to black out completely during the first thirty seconds. As soon as you are under way, the stroke drops to about forty, but not much less, because the course from Iffley lock to the top of the barges is only about a mile and a half.

Most of the members of your college are scrambling along the towpath beside you, yelling and shooting off guns. You can't tell whether the boat behind you is gaining, because you are watching Stroke's oar or your own, but if the cox's voice rises to a scream and he starts counting to raise the beat you know you are overtaking the boat ahead. When your bow overlaps his stern, the cox turns the rudder sharply. Bow touches stern. This is the bump.

When you make a bump, the next day your boat starts in the place of the bumped boat. You go up or down each day according to your prowess. The final aim, which may take several years to achieve, is to become Head of the River, the first boat in line.

I came back from Paris not in the best of shape. A wisdom tooth had started acting up. It ached and swelled monotonously. I made my apologies to Tom Smith, and he found another Six. For a week I tried to ignore it, hoping the swelling would go away. It didn't and I asked the dean to recommend a dentist. I found this man in what I took to be a large bedroom with the bed moved out. The walls were covered with flowered wall-paper, and a chromo of Watts' *Hope* hung on the wall. He sat me down in a chair with four legs. He took a look and, as God is my judge, he prescribed an infusion of camomile and poppy-head—not opium, poppyhead—with which to bathe the afflicted parts. I was not sleeping much and I was smoking

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about fifty cigarettes a day, but I bathed away conscientiously. It didn't do any good. The swelling went gruesomely on. When I looked as if I were trying to conceal a scarlet pippin in my cheek I went back to the dentist and said, "Lance this, will you?" He bumbled and said at last, "I can't. I'm not a dental surgeon." So he took me to a real surgeon, who had his learning son in the office, and there before a blazing coal fire the three together gave me gas and lanced it. Afterward I didn't feel good, but at least I didn't feel like a bomb about to go off.

That night I was sitting in front of my fire, reading and bathing my wound with a little neat whisky when Tom Smith knocked at my door. He said that his No. 6 had just come down with a bad case of flu. Toggers started the next day. Would I care to fill in? It was so casual and the honour of the U.S.A. depended so heavily on it that I said I would be delighted—which was a lie.

On the first day of Toggers I was personally lucky. I had to row only the first six strokes. When the little brass cannon went off, we laid into the first strokes hard. The cox had just shouted, "Six!" when No. 7 in front of me caught a crab. If you are quick you can sometimes lie flat and let the oar pass over your head. Seven was not quick. He was probably blacked out, and the butt of the oar caught him in the belly and jack-knifed him out of the boat. Falling, he broke his oar smack off at the rowlock. The boat staggered. There were cries of "Man overboard!" and the cox was yelling oaths like a banshee. I don't believe it is possible to overturn an eight-oared boat, but we nearly made it. In the confusion, Exeter came tearing into us from behind and sheared off all the oars on the bow side. It was a mess. No. 7 avoided having Exeter's keel bash his head in by cannily staying under water until after the collision; then he swam soggily ashore. Our race was over for that day and I was barely winded.

The next day, with new oars, we caught St. John's on the Green Bank and made a bump. In fact, we made five bumps in all during Toggers. If a boat makes five bumps in Toggers or four in Eights the college is required by custom to stand its members a Bump supper. It is a big jollification in honour of the Boat Club. The manciple (head chef) outdoes himself and provides a really good meal, with fresh soup (I think) and champagne at will. Alumni gather and there are sherry parties. Since many Oriel undergraduates study theology, many of its graduates are parsons, but Church of England clergy are not stuffy. They go to sherry parties, and they don't stand around with a glass in their hands for the look of things, either.

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At our Bump supper the hall was in an uproar because of the sherry parties beforehand. Cheers were started but forgotten. Boating songs were begun, broken off, and begun again. A stately portrait of Matthew Arnold, once an Oriel don, hung on the wall. A swaying youth, his boiled shirt coming out in welts from spilt champagne, pegged an orange from the centrepiece clean through Matthew's jaw just at the muttonchop. A bonfire sprang up in the front quad, fed by side tables, chairs, and Van Gogh reproductions.

The son of a Scottish laird broke into the provost's lodgings, stole all the shoes belonging to that good old man (now knighted for his translations of Aristotle) and hurled them all into the flames.

High above the quad in a third-floor bedroom a man crouched, waiting for the supper to finish. He had collected half the chamber pots in the college. (They used them then, and it is no more than even money they use them now.) In a room directly opposite, another man had collected the other half. A rope hung in a curve from one window to the other. At last the dons appeared under the porch of the hall, chatting only less than boisterously from the champagne. They were in full fig—dinner jackets, long M.A. gowns, and mortarboards. They walked down the steps in the wavering light of the bonfire. At that moment a shower of broken crockery fell on their heads. Rope ends had been slung through the pot handles, letting the pots slide down the rope two at a time. When they met they broke and fell on the dean, the provost, the bursar, the Goldsmith's reader, a bishop or two, and other dignitaries. Big joke.

The party went on all night, consuming untold bottles of Pommery and Piper-Heidsieck and much of the movable furniture of the college. At one point, I was told, seven drunken archdeacons danced around the bonfire—a spectacle very likely unmatched since the martyrdom of Ridley and Latimer, who were burnt years earlier in Broad Street and from the top of whose Gothic monument the Oxford Alpine Club hangs a chamber pot each year.

The next morning the groans of hangover were decently stifled by the mists in the quad. The scouts were out with rakes and shovels, cleaning away the empties, the shards of crockery, and the ashes of the bonfire strewn with the nails and eyelets of the provost's shoes. The culprit was haled before the dean, presented with a bill for upward of a hundred and fifty chamber pots and laughingly fined £10. Toggers were over.

I have never rowed since nor drunk so much champagne.

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A Song at Twilight

By E. L. MALPASS

OH, a lovely day that was. One of those joyous days when you keep wishing Time's Winged Chariot would develop some sort of engine trouble.

But it never does. No good asking that old Time to suspend his flight, is it? Though, give him his due, he nips through the bad days as fast as through the good ones. Very impartial, the old gentleman is.

It was the Reverend Ifor Thomas started it all. Easter Monday, with the snows melting on the tops, and the mountain streams running brown and full, laughing like children, and the sun full of new warmth, and the hills, old these million years, looking as though they had been made during the night. Even the grey little town was awash with happiness, the women in bright new frocks, the men sleeked and combed, the dogs running dotty in the soft wind, the cats snoozing watchful. And young Ifor Thomas, his collar white as a sickle moon against the night-black of his hair, strode through the town singing . . .

Not a Welshman living would not have been drawn as by a magnet to that rich baritone. "Where you going, Mr. Thomas?" asked Willie the Milk, enthralled.

Pointed to the hills, did Ifor Thomas, and strode on. Willie fell in beside him, his tenor mingling like silver with the rich, dark flood of Ifor's song. Then the Eynon brothers, arm in arm, and old Eli Llewelyn, a bit wheezy on the high notes but still good for a firm, solid bass. Before the houses were behind them they were a hundred strong, marching they knew not where or why, joyously singing the old chapel tunes that had been their strength and the strength of their fathers.

Now their boots were on turf finer than a gentleman's lawn.

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The hills rose up before them. They looked back at the slate-grey town, softened already by distance and a blue haze of smoke. Then they turned and marched, still singing, into the high wild mountains.

Never, in all his life, had Willie the Milk been so happy. Every now and then he would glance shyly at the smiling, uplifted face of Ifor Thomas. Under his feet and before his eyes was the good Welsh earth. He was in close communion with it; and with the sun, burning deliciously into his cheek; but most of all with the music which bore him like a strong-running tide. Only one thing he lacked to make his happiness complete—Cerigwen Edwards, who lived with her mam in a white cottage in the next valley.

Sometimes when Willie called with the milk she smiled at him. Sometimes she stared at him haughty. But whichever way it was, Willie thought her the most beautiful creature he had ever seen, and loved her tenderly but quite hopelessly. For he had no illusions that Cerigwen, or any other girl, would ever look twice at him. Willie was humble, see. So he put Cerigwen, so far as he could, out of his mind, and gave himself up to the music.

The sun climbed to the zenith. They came to a great bowl in the hills, ringed by ancient rocks. They lay down on the dew-starred grass. Before them were the lush, cattle-dappled valleys, dozing in the noonday, and a wild tumble of hills, green, then blue, barred with distant white. The men had done singing for a time, leaving it to the larks. Willie lay on his back and watched one of them, hanging from the blue ceiling. Must be difficult, he thought, and tried to imagine himself flapping his arms nineteen to the dozen, while he sang the *Hallelujah Chorus* . . .

But Ifor was speaking now, slow and lazy, of the love of God which was like the sunlight, he said, touching them all, and every blade of grass, and the tiny hurrying spiders, and the sheep with their lambs. Some of the men listened. Some lay, eyes closed, their hands clasped behind their heads. Some talked softly among themselves. And time passed, the noontide faded into the long golden afternoon.

Willie, filled with content, saw a white track, old before the Romans came, beckoning him. He wandered off. All about him was the silence of the hills. Only the little breeze of evening, and the song of the larks . . .

And then he heard it . . . A high, sweet singing that came from nowhere and everywhere. From the blue sky and the mighty hills. Distant it was, and yet near at hand. Willie found himself

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trembling. For a long time he stood, listening. Then he ran back to the men.

They were standing up now, picking up their jackets, brushing the dew from their clothes. And they were singing again, ready for their march back to the town. *Cwm Rhondda*, full, deep throated.

"Listen," cried Willie.

They were silent, listening. But the music had ceased. They heard nothing. "What was it?" asked Ifor Thomas, looking thoughtfully at Willie's rapt face.

"'Twas the Heavenly Choir," said Willie.

"When? Where?"

Willie said, "All around. Seemed to fill the whole sky, strong and sweet."

Ifor Thomas put a hand on Willie's shoulder. "Wonderful, this news is, Willie. Go down to history like that old Joan of Arc, you will."

Very gratified, Willie felt. Didn't know what his mam would say, having his name coupled with Joan somebody-or-other. But nice having Mr. Thomas' hand on his shoulder, and all the men looking at him respectful.

Ordinary in the extreme, Willie's life had been up till now. Delivering the milk seven days a week in all weathers. "Morning Willie, got a small cream to spare today, is it?" "Morning, Willie bach, pay you next week, sure as eggs, but not this week." His greatest problem nineteen pints at sevenpence halfpenny: "Well there is difficult, Mrs. Evans; say ten bob, shall we?"

But suddenly all that was changed. Willie was famous. Willie had tuned in, as it were, to celestial music.

Made him a Deacon of the Chapel, they did, the very next day. And Ifor Thomas announced that the following Sunday, after the evening service, he would invite Willie into the pulpit.

Terrified, Willie was. Awful lonely places, those old pulpits, if you haven't had the training. "But what shall I say?" he asked.

"Just tell them what happened. In your own simple words," said Ifor. "A great spiritual experience for us all, it will be."

But Willie knew he wouldn't have any simple words. He knew that when he found himself in that pulpit, he would be as speechless as an oyster. "Couldn't *you* tell them what happened, Mr. Thomas?" he begged. "Got the gift of the gab, you have, with a thousand dictionary words at your beck and call."

"Wouldn't be the same, Willie. 'Tis you they want to hear, man."

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Thought of emigrating to New Zealand, did Willie. But there wasn't time. And there was his mam, mending his shirt collar and ironing his blue serge, and getting the bath out of the cupboard under the stairs. Inexorable, the march of circumstance was.

On the Saturday evening Willie could stand it no longer. He took himself and his troubles up into the mountains.

Very peaceful it was there; with men, and all the conflict they bring, a thousand feet below. But Willie found he was not alone. Someone was moving on a ridge above him. A girl in a white frock, walking slow and pensive on the hills.

Almost stopped beating, Willie's heart did. Could it be? He began to climb towards her. She looked down then. Yes, Cerigwen it was. And then, wonder of wonders, she was coming towards him.

She looked at him, one dark eyebrow raised. Then: "It's Willie, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Willie, wishing he'd gone the other way. He hadn't expected Cerigwen to be effusive. But her present attitude, he felt, was enough to bring the snowline down a few hundred feet. "Well, be going now," he said, ill at ease in the extreme.

Cerigwen seemed to soften a little. "Just rehearsing my speech," she said.

"What speech is that, Cerigwen?"

Up shot that eyebrow again. "Haven't you heard? Addressing the Mothers of Wales on my experience, I am. In Cardiff, too."

Out of his depth, Willie was. But not daring to ask what experience. Couldn't bear people jumping down his throat, could Willie. But Cerigwen was warming to her audience. "Heard about that, I suppose?" she said casually.

"Well—er—no," admitted Willie.

"Listened to the Heavenly Choir on Easter Monday," said Cerigwen. And waited for the applause.

But Willie said, "Well, there is interesting. So you heard it, too?"

"What do you mean, 'too'?"

"Heard it myself," said Willie. "And got to go in the pulpit tomorrow and tell about it," he added miserably.

"Fancy," said Cerigwen, not too pleased to have shared her experience with someone as undistinguished as Willie. She patted her dark hair. "Talking of making me the Temperance Queen of Caernarvonshire," she said, very lofty.

"Oh, there is nice," said the wretched Willie, seeing this

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girl he loved being removed even farther from his humble sphere. "Where were you when you heard this singing, Cerigwen?"

"Just over the hill. Come up with the Llangrwl Ladies' Chorus, I had, for an afternoon's practice."

The one thing Willie and his love seemed to have in common was their experience. He clung to it. "Some fine sopranos in that Heavenly Choir," he said.

"Sopranos?" Cerigwen said. "Not a soprano in the whole outfit. Male voices, every one."

Puzzled, Willie was. "What were they singing, then?"

"*Cwm Rhondda*," said Cerigwen. "Very powerful."

A late caller. The Reverend Ifor Thomas, deep in his Sunday sermon, put down his pen and went to the door. "Why, Willie," he said. "What is it?"

Willie edged in. "Good evening, Mr. Thomas. Just came to tell you." He fiddled with his cap. "'Twasn't the Heavenly Choir after all, Mr. Thomas."

"It wasn't?" Dumbfounded, Mr. Thomas looked. "Then what was it, Willie?"

"The Llangrwl Ladies," said Willie.

Well, there was difficult. Big posters up outside the chapel, and an overflow meeting booked for the Keir Hardie Hall. "How do you know this?" asked Ifor.

Told him, did Willie.

A good man, that reverend. Straight as a die. But zealous for the Lord. "Don't see that you can prove this, Willie," he said, very thoughtful.

"But pretty sure in my own mind, Mr. Thomas," Willie said unhappily.

"Be a pity to mistake a genuine spiritual experience for the Llangrwl Ladies," went on Ifor.

Looked down at his feet, did Willie.

"Came fifth in the Eisteddfod, did the Llangrwl Ladies. Wouldn't have expected a man of your musical discernment to mistake them for the Heavenly Choir."

The conversation was getting nowhere. "Can't go into that old pulpit now, Mr. Thomas," said Willie.

"No," said Ifor Thomas. "No. Wouldn't be right, would it, Willie, with doubt gnawing like a canker at your mind." But unconvinced he sounded, despite his reassuring words. "Did you tell Cerigwen Edwards about your misgivings?" he asked.

"No. Thought she might be angry, see."

"Very wise. Very wise," said Ifor. He sighed. "Right, Willie. Have to cancel the whole thing, shan't we." He

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remembered something. "Better tell Miss Edwards now, hadn't you."

Swallowed, did Willie. "Tell Cerigwen?"

"Can't let her go on with her performance, can you? Not after your public disavowal. Though very disappointing it is going to be for her. Not a nice thing to have to tell a spirited girl like her."

Oh, a cruel dilemma that was for Willie. Pulled all ways, he was. "Maybe," he said. "Maybe it was the Heavenly Choir after all, Mr. Thomas."

"Wouldn't want you to do anything against your conscience, Willie," Mr. Thomas said kindly. "But you think I can leave those old posters where they are, then?"

Willie nodded, and went miserably home, wrestling with his conscience all the way. But the thought of Cerigwen's dark eyes flashing as she heard that Willie had spoilt her chance of both the Mothers of Wales and the Temperance Queen, kept him to his decision. And there was his mam with his blue serge laid out on the bed and the bath drawn up to the fire. It was no good. He would do what was expected of him . . .

They were singing the last hymn. Willie opened and closed his mouth. But he wasn't making a sound. His lips were too dry. A few more bars and then, in the awful ensuing silence, Mr. Thomas would come and lead him, Willie, from the comparative safety of the third pew to the high lonely pulpit.

And so it happened. Many have mounted the scaffold with a stronger spirit than Willie's on that occasion. And while Mr. Thomas made his introductory remarks, Willie gazed at the faces below him. Everyone very respectful, he had to admit. His mam in a new hat with grapes, looking as pleased as punch, but trying not to. And then, a face he had never hoped to see, a face that would have driven every thought out of his head if there had been any there. The exquisitely moulded features of Cerigwen Edwards!

Gone very quiet in the little chapel, it had. Willie looked round anxiously, thinking that either Mr. Thomas or the organist had missed his cue. And then he realised the dreadful truth. It wasn't Mr. Thomas they were waiting for. It wasn't the organist.

It was Willie.

"Off you *go*," whispered the minister. A bit strained, he was looking.

Willie glanced wildly round. He grasped the edge of the pulpit. "'Twasn't the Heavenly Choir, after all," he said in a high, tight voice. "Mistaken I was, see. The Llangrwl Ladies' Chorus—

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they were on one side—and we were on the other, singing *Cwm Rhondda*, and—well, Miss Edwards heard us and thought we were the Heavenly Choir, and we—I—heard them and . . ."

He trailed off. "Well, there is lucid," commented Lawyer Griffiths in a voice that was heard clearly in the Keir Hardie Hall. But worse was to come. There was a clatter and a commotion on the floor of the house. Miss Cerigwen Edwards had walked out in high heels and dudgeon.

But now Ifor Thomas was taking command. With one arm supporting the flagging Willie he said, "My friends, Willie has put us all to shame. He has dared to speak the truth as he sees it." He paused. "Perhaps no one of us, in this life anyway, will know what he really heard on the mountain. Was it indeed the angel song? Or was it the Llangrwl Ladies? We may never know. But Willie knew there was a doubt. I, my friends, was prepared to ignore that doubt, to the greater glory of God. Willie was not. Tonight he has shown me the nobler path."

Well, more than ever a hero, Willie was now. Except, of course, to the one person who mattered. For now, when he called with the milk, Cerigwen looked right through him. And Willie, gazing on her high, proud beauty, knew that being a hero to the rest of the valley was dust and ashes. One smile, one tender word from Cerigwen, and everything else could go hang. Oh, very sorrowful Willie was. And when the day came that some unknown from Anglesey was crowned Temperance Queen, then Willie's heart bled—as much for his rejected Cerigwen as for himself.

The ceremony of the crowning was over. The people began to disperse. And there, in the crowd, her head held high, a tight, brittle smile on her lips, was Cerigwen.

Not a brave man, that Willie. But he could not stand aside when he saw suffering. "Cerigwen," he called.

She looked in his direction. Two sharp lines appeared between her eyes. Willie trembled. But he pushed through the crowd towards her. "Sorry I am, Cerigwen," he said gently.

"You?" she said scornfully. "You? Sorry?"

"Yes, indeed," said Willie. "Very disappointing for you, it must be."

"They can keep their old crown," said Cerigwen, very bitter.

Wasn't easy. But Willie persevered. "Suppose you wouldn't like to come for a walk in the hills? Be pleasant up there, after all the excitement."

"What? With you?"

Hell, Willie reflected sadly, could have no fury like a Cerigwen done out of a Temperance crown. Nevertheless, she began to

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walk by his side, away from the crowds, away from the little town. Willie was silent, almost bursting with the effort to exude quiet sympathy. Cerigwen was silent, too. But suddenly she cried, " Very pleased they all were, weren't they, to see me miss the crown? "

" I was not," Willie said simply. " Very lovely you would have looked in it, Cerigwen."

" But the others were pleased."

" Some may have been," Willie admitted. Not very popular, that Cerigwen, see. Too big for her boots, Willie's mam diagnosed, speaking for one and all.

They were high above the housetops now, and the sunset was all about them. Willie led Cerigwen to a shelf of rock. They sat down. Willie said, " Very beautiful, the choir sounded that day. And you their leading soprano. Why don't you sing something, Cerigwen? "

" Don't feel like singing," said Cerigwen. Then she gave what, in a less majestic creature, would have been a sniff. And then she was weeping wildly on Willie's shoulder.

" There, there," said Willie, daring to slip an arm round this goddess' waist. " What is it, then? "

" Oh, there is miserable I am," cried Cerigwen. " Giving the crown to that creature from Anglesey. And everyone saying, 'Glad they didn't give it that Cerigwen Edwards. Serve her right, the stuck-up thing!' " She gazed at Willie through her tears. " Am I stuck-up, Willie? "

" Not any more," he said. He swallowed. " Cerigwen, yesterday I was only Willie the Milk, not much to look at, not much of a catch. But now—still not much to look at, I'm afraid, but—a Deacon of the Chapel, I am, and highly thought of. Going down into history with George Washington, Mr. Thomas says."

" George who? " asked Cerigwen.

" Cut down his father's cherry tree," explained Willie. " Will you marry me, Cerigwen? "

" Don't know," she said. " Have to think about it, shan't we? " She smiled, and dried her tears, squeezed his hand. Then, after a time, she stood up and began to walk back down the hill. Willie put his arm firmly about her waist and went with her. She laid her head on his shoulder and started to sing, a quiet sad crooning that had the catch of tears. And Willie, gazing at her dark beauty, hearing her song, did not mind any more about those old angels. Quite content with the singing of a mortal, Willie was, when that mortal was his dear Cerigwen.

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Rustlers

BY GEORGE BYRAM

AT a conversational distance my dad can see as well as any man, but at a hundred yards he can't tell a white-faced calf from a cactus blossom. If he could, this story would have ended sooner and differently.

Dad's name is Fred Zipson, but everybody—including me—calls him Zip. He was fifty-five when I was born, and I was twenty that summer. He is as capable and self-reliant, except for his sight, as he was fifty-seven years ago, when he settled in this part of Wyoming. He has never taken a dime's worth of Government aid in the bad times, and in the good times he has put all the profit back into the ranch to keep from paying income tax. Today the ranch includes thirty-six sections of plains and mountains, and Zip runs it in the old way, with good men on good horses. I'm not bragging when I say I had to make the grade the same as any other hand.

I admire Zip, but I might as well admit we don't get along too well. It's that we grew up in different eras. I can best explain by pointing out that when I was seventeen and my mother lay dying, she didn't tell Zip to keep me out of trouble; she told *me* to keep Zip out of trouble. I knew I wasn't succeeding too well long before that morning on Horseshoe Ridge when Zip handed

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me the rifle and told me to shoot that "damned rustler!"

It had started ten days previously. Sandy McDonald, Zip's foreman for forty years, and I were moving the first herd up to summer pasture. With a brilliant sun making heat mirages on the prairie, I saw in the distance, almost hidden in a patch of sagebrush, what appeared to be a weather-dulled piece of red cloth or a rusty, crushed oil drum. It hadn't been there the last time I passed, so I rode over. As I approached closely, my horse reared and danced sideways, keeping his head to it. When I saw the white I knew what it was. I stepped off and walked up to the head and skin of a Hereford. There was a neat bullet hole in the curl of white hair in the centre of the forehead. I straightened the hip portion of the wrinkled, board-stiff skin. The brand was Zip's Bar Z.

I got on my horse quickly to keep Sandy from knowing what I'd found, but he had topped a rise and had seen me hunkered down in the brush. He rode over. "What'd you find?" he asked.

"Nothing," I replied.

Sandy is almost as old as Zip, but there's nothing wrong with his eyes. He grinned at me and reined his horse round. I followed him. He stopped by the skin, cocked a leg over the saddle horn, and rolled a cigarette.

"'At's how they do it nowadays," he said philosophically. "Rifle an' pickup truck with a winch in back. Kill 'em, string 'em up, butcher 'em, an' high-tail with the meat." He made a ritual of licking and lighting his smoke. "If you was foreman 'stead o' me, what would you do?"

"Get the sheriff," I said promptly.

His eyebrows shot up in mock surprise. "Not tell Zip?"

"Last fellow rustled Zip's stock died with his boots on," I said.

"That was fifty years ago," said Sandy. "Times have changed."

"Times have, but Zip hasn't."

"Zip ain't done a raunchy thing since he throw'd that insurance salesman in the dippin' vat."

"Hasn't been anything to rile him since," I replied. "Have a heart, Sandy. I promised Ma I'd keep him out of trouble. You know what he'll do."

"A man cain't stan' by an' let some polecat rustle 'is cows."

"We've got law and plenty of men to enforce it."

"Where was they when this happened?" Sandy indicated the steer hide.

I was mad, because I couldn't think of an answer. "You and Zip are just aching for some excitement."

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" Law can't do nothin' till the rustlers is caught. Zip'll jes' catch 'em an' turn 'em over to the law."

" Yeah, feet first."

" Well," said Sandy, " wouldn' you say that's the rustlers' lookout? "

Late that afternoon, as Sandy and I were unsaddling at the ranch, Zip rode in. He came off his horse stiffly, as a young man who is tired, not as a seventy-five-year-old whose joints will be stiff the remainder of his life. He was a tall man, still erect. His face was a mass of wrinkles showing no expression except around the eyes, which usually had a comic glint. But today he looked at Sandy and me with a frown and strode towards the house with only a grunt of greeting.

At supper Zip said, " I don' like the feel of things."

Sandy looked at me from under his brows. " What things, Zip? "

" I been ridin' all day. Somebody's rustling cows."

" How can you tell? " I asked. " You don't even know how many head you own."

" I don' know how I kin tell," replied Zip with his usual candour, " but I kin."

" Tell 'im, Tom," said Sandy.

Zip looked up from his food, first at me, then at Sandy. " Tell 'im what? "

Sandy kept looking at me and then Zip looked at me. " I found a hide and skull on the way to the mountain this morning," I said. " They're using rifles and pickups."

Zip stared at me for about thirty seconds. " Jes' find *one*? "

" That's all."

" Look fer any more? "

" Didn't have time."

" Startin' in the mornin'," he said, " we'll take time."

" Who? " asked Sandy, still grinning at me from under his brows.

" Me an' Tom," said Zip. " An' you an' Roy—an' mebbe you better git another pair at it too."

I gave Sandy an I'll-fix-you look, but he was busy with his food. " You going to call the sheriff? " I asked.

" Sure," said Zip, " jes' as soon as I ketch up to 'em."

" You promise? " I asked.

" I do," said Zip. " Barrin' unforeseeable circumstances."

The next morning Zip and I were well out from the ranch at dawn. Sandy and three other hands were paired off and riding the pastures where we had kept the cows during the winter.

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" We'll stick close together," said Zip. What he meant was he couldn't see far enough to spot anything. " How long would you say that cowhide's been up there? " he asked.

" We haven't had any stock toward the mountains since last fall," I replied.

" Then it's an old kill. Where you think we ought to start huntin'? " he asked.

" Right up there where Sandy and I were yesterday."

" Why? " he asked.

" We checked all the fences and water yesterday. If anybody saw us, they wouldn't expect us back for some time."

He grinned, and we rode toward the mountains.

In the next several days we wore out three pairs of horses. We were in the saddle sixteen hours a day. It was rough country, as hard on men as it was on horses. We found six more skulls and skins, but none of them were fresh kills.

The only unusual thing that happened was me sitting down beside a rattlesnake once when we stopped to rest. Zip was still mounted about six feet away when the snake cut loose from the shade of the small boulder on which I was sitting. Zip drew and fired before I could jump. The snake and its head parted company. One thing I thought in that moment was that if Zip would just swallow his pride and put on glasses, he could see at a distance as well as he could up close.

We slept only those few hours when it was too dark to see and when the moon was not bright. We combed the draws and the valleys that felt their way like fingers back into the granite of the mountains. The grass was new and green and the earth was lovely with spring, but we were looking too hard for fresh signs to enjoy the countryside. Then we began to find tyre tracks on bare ground and in the bottom of sandy draws. When we rode down the tracks, we found a skull with a bullet hole and a skin freshly dried by the sun. We were always a day or two late.

In the early afternoon on the tenth day we came up out of the badlands that lie before Horseshoe Ridge, and running across the prairie were the silver streaks that tyres make when they flatten new green grass. Zip stepped down and examined the grass. It was still straightening.

" Not more'n thirty minutes old," he pronounced.

" Which way was he going? " I asked.

He rose. " Roun' the ridge."

The ridge got its name because it was shaped like a horseshoe. It was about three miles across from one heel of the shoe to the other. Inside the shoe, tier after tier of boulder fields and gnarled pine thickets rose to a height of over nine hundred feet.

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The outside of the shoe all the way round was sheer walls.

"We better get after him," I said.

"Not time," said Zip. "Member that bunch of cows we saw yestid'y under the walls of the toe? They're the on'y ones in the direction he's goin'." He looked up into the amphitheatre. "We got to climb."

"The horses can't make it."

"No," said Zip, "but we kin."

We unsaddled and hobbled the horses. I was carrying binoculars. Zip was carrying a 30.30. After the first five hundred feet the muscles of my calves and thighs became numb and twitchy and my breath burnt in my lungs. The binoculars grew heavier and heavier. I knew it was the same with the rifle Zip carried. But he never stopped, and neither did I.

When we got to the top, we lay on a great slab of granite at the edge of the cliff, almost a thousand feet above the prairie, unable to do anything except suck in great lungfuls of air and let the ache go out of our muscles. Finally we rolled over on our bellies and looked down.

Far below us, looking like a bug skittering across a vast, green carpet, was a pickup truck. It was angling in towards the base of the cliff. We could see the minute, red figure of a Hereford grazing a hundred yards out from the base of the cliff, and a few more head scattered in the distance.

The pickup came toward that speck of red by the cliff. It moved to within fifty feet, swung broadside, and stopped. We could see the sun glinting on a rifle barrel thrust out of the window on the driver's side. We saw the steer suddenly crumple and a little later heard the report of the rifle. The truck jerked into motion and skittered over to the downed beef. The door flew open and a man stepped out, bent down, and we could see him sticking the beef to bleed it.

I unslung my binoculars. Zip already had unslung his rifle. "Is they another one in the pickup?" asked Zip.

I put the glasses on the rear window. "No."

"Bold feller to work alone. Kin you make out his number?"

"The angle's too vertical. I'll get it when he pulls away."

The lever of Zip's rifle went snick-snack. "He ain't gonna pull away."

"You promised you'd turn him over to the sheriff."

Zip was squinting speculatively in the direction of the rustler. "I promised, barrin' unforeseeable circumstances. How much time would you say it's gonna take him to finish that job?"

Through the glasses I saw that the beef had been rolled on its back, the head tucked around against the side, with the horns

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planted to hold the carcass in place. The man was swiftly and skilfully skinning the belly, his knife working in smooth strokes that laid back the hide unbelievably swiftly. "Fifteen minutes."

"How long would you say it'd take us to git to the horses an' ride aroun' there?"

"Three hours."

"That's what I call unforeseeable circumstances. What does he look like?"

"Big man. Black-headed. Looks to be twenty-seven, thirty."

"Know him?" asked Zip.

"No."

Zip held out the rifle to me. "Kin you hit 'im fum here?"

"I could," I said, ignoring the rifle.

Zip rolled on his side and looked at me. "Well, do it then."

"I can't pot a man from ambush, Zip."

"Don't kill 'im," said Zip. "Jes' shoot 'im in the legs."

"The angle's too great. I might hit him anywhere."

"Shoot fer 'is legs, an' if you kill 'im it'll be an accident."

"Zip, I just can't cold-bloodedly kill a man."

"He ain't a man," yelled Zip, "he's a damned rustler!"

I saw the man pause, knife poised, head cocked to one side. "You better pipe down. I think he heard you."

"Listen, Tom," Zip pleaded. "I know you think you're doin' what your ma would want, but I swear I'm tellin' the gospel truth when I say your ma hated rustlers as bad as me."

The man had gone back to work.

"Zip, I hate that rustler just as bad as you do, but I won't shoot him."

"I'd never suggest it if they was any other way," said Zip. "In a few minutes he's gonna be gone. Jes' bust 'im some'eres aroun' the legs."

"You might as well let up," I said. "I'm not going to do it."

Zip snatched off his hat and hit the granite with it. "Damn my weak eyes and this younger generation." It was the first time he had admitted his eyes were failing. "Why you think we been killin' horses fer almost two weeks? Why you think we broke our humps climbin' up here?"

"To get his truck number," I replied.

Zip rolled away in disgust. "Ef he was in handgun range, his number'd be up." After a while he turned back. "What're you gonna do with his number once you git it?"

"Find out who the guy is and turn him over to the sheriff."

"What're you gonna do when the sheriff asks for evidence?"

"Bring him out and show him these carcasses."

"How you gonna tie the carcasses to the man?"

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"We both saw him."

"Fum nine hunnerd feet up. You think that'll hold in court?"

"Ten-power glasses makes it ninety feet. It'll hold up."

Zip had been squinting hard at the man far below us. Suddenly he said, "Gimme them glasses."

I handed him the glasses. With my naked eyes I could just make out that the man had hoisted the beef with a winch and was splitting the white carcass down the spine.

"He sure is an expert," said Zip.

"He's had enough practice," I replied, remembering the skulls and skins we'd found.

Zip continued looking through the glasses. "Wouldn' be s'prised he's had more practice than you think. You ain't goin' to shoot 'im?"

"No, sir."

"Then you make damn sure you git that number." He handed me the glasses.

The rustler finished the job quickly, folded his winch, put it and the sides of beef in the bed of the truck, covered them with a tarpaulin and, without taking time to hide the offal, sped away. I got a good look and focused all my attention on seeing the numbers. Zip looked at me. I spoke the numbers.

"Number-six county, eh?" he said musingly. That was our county. The county seat was our town, the town where we did all our trading. "We'll be there in the mornin'," said Zip.

When we got to the house, Sandy was just riding in with his partner. They looked as beat as Zip and I. "Any luck?" called Sandy.

"Some," replied Zip.

Sensing something in Zip's tone, Sandy reined his horse over to us.

"We caught 'im red-handed," said Zip, "but he got away."

Sandy looked at Zip in disbelief. "Got away!"

Zip explained our predicament on top of Horseshoe, ending with, "an' Tom wouldn' shoot 'im."

Sandy looked at me in disapproval, shook his head, and began to roll a cigarette, every move showing disgust.

"Don't make so much of it," I said to Sandy. "He didn't get entirely away. We got his number."

"It would've been so simple," said Sandy. "Now you'll have to fight 'im in court fer six months, an' then he'll likely git out of it."

"We ain't gonna fight 'im in no court," said Zip, "an' he ain't gonna git out of it." He turned to me. "Go take care of the horses, Tom."

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I went toward the barn with the horses, and Zip and Sandy walked into the living-room of the house. I ground-hitched the horses behind the garage, sprinted low behind Mamma's lilac bushes and came back beneath the living-room window.

Zip was saying, "You follow me?"

"So far," said Sandy. "When I phone, if I find out you're right, I load a beef in your pickup in the mornin' right after breakfast?"

"Right," said Zip. "An' remember it's important fer you to have the horses there when we git there in the mornin'. You understan'?"

"Got you," said Sandy. "You gonna tell Tom?"

"Tom's a good boy," said Zip. "But he sure does take after his ma."

I slipped away from the window and headed for the barn. I heard Sandy pull out in his truck. I knew I had to get hold of the sheriff, but the problem was how. We live fifty miles from town. The nearest telephone was at Summers' General Store at a crossroads eighteen miles from our house. I was dead tired, but I knew I had to drive there after supper.

Sandy was back by suppertime, and he and Zip looked me over suspiciously. I had cleaned up and changed my clothes.

"Goin' some'eres?" asked Zip.

"Thought I'd pass the time of day with Betty Summers."

"As tired as you are," said Zip.

"Ever'body knows Betty Summers ain't that purty," said Sandy.

"Maybe it's that, within twenty miles, she's the only girl," I replied.

"We got a big day ahead of us tomorrer," said Zip.

"I won't stay long."

"About long enough to make a phone call would be my guess," said Zip.

"If I knew what Sandy found out when *he* phoned and what you and he are up to, I wouldn't need to see Betty tonight."

Zip looked at Sandy, but spoke to me. "Then ag'in, mebbe you would."

"You've figured some way to catch that guy and not turn him over to the sheriff," I said.

"Tom, I swear I'm gonna turn 'im over to the sheriff—but at the right time."

Suddenly Sandy threw down his fork. "Damn. I fergot to turn on the windmill, an' that tank is plumb dry. They's a stiff breeze out there now an' she oughta be pumpin'. Be right back."

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"Son," said Zip, "that rustler is a canny feller. The way you want to handle him, it'd jes' be our word ag'in his, an' you kin bet he would have some kind of proof that he was some'eres besides *where* we said he was *when* we said he was. He's got to be handled my way."

"I don't like going against you," I said, "but I know blamed well you're planning somehow to get that guy in a fight and kill him."

"I ain't goin' to kill 'im."

"Then tell me what you plan to do."

"I will, Tom. In the mornin'."

"Nothing doing. I'm finding out tonight who he is and phoning the sheriff."

"I reckon a man's got to do what he's got to do," said Zip philosophically.

Deciding to take Zip's car, I went to the garage. The keys were in the ignition, as they always are in all our vehicles, but the car wouldn't start. The starter whined, but the engine wouldn't fire. I got out and went over to Zip's pickup. Same result. I got out, opened her up, took off the distributor cap and sure enough, the rotor arm was gone. I checked every vehicle on the place. All the same. I went back to the house, angrier because I'd let Sandy trick me than because of being baulked on the phone call.

Zip and Sandy were finishing their supper, bland-faced, innocent.

"Change your mind?" asked Zip.

"I ought to catch up a horse and go," I said, "but I'm just too tired."

"Ain't no rustler worth all that effort," said Sandy.

"I wish I could get it through your heads a rustler is still a human being—"

"Some difference of opinion on that," interrupted Zip.

"—and you can't go around shooting them," I finished.

"Unless they shoot at you," said Sandy.

I looked sharply at Zip, and Zip said to Sandy, "The older you git, the more your tongue waggles."

"You are going to provoke him!" I exclaimed.

"No sich thing," said Zip. "Now quiet down and don't fret yourse'f."

The next morning Zip came down to breakfast wearing the old, slick-handled .45 he'd shot the snake with.

"Since when do you wear your gun to town?" I asked.

"Don't start in on me about the gun," said Zip as he seated

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himself. "I don' aim to use it, barrin' unforeseeable circumstances."

"I've heard that tune before," I said.

"It's purely a persuader," he said.

Sandy came in and sat down. "Well, yer steer's loaded."

"How about the horses?" asked Zip.

"They'll be there," replied Sandy.

"I suppose you're still not letting me in on your plans," I said.

"Don' mind at all," said Zip. "We're gonna catch that rustler red-handed—an' I mean that jes' the way it sounds."

"How?"

"Well, now, Tom, they's a few details I ain't even sure of myse'f."

We finished breakfast, and Zip and I went out and got in the truck with the steer in the stock rack. I saw Sandy mount Zip's horse and lead mine as he rode away from the ranch.

When Zip and I got to the city limits, I asked, "We going to the courthouse to see who that truck number belongs to?"

"B'longs to a feller name o' Conroy," said Zip.

I'd been right about Sandy's phone call. "Where does this Conroy live?"

"Three miles north of town."

I was driving the pickup, and I pulled up at one of those roadside telephone booths. "We're going to have an understanding, or I call the sheriff. What do you plan to do when we get out to Conroy's?"

"I'm goin' to force Conroy to provide the evidence we got to have to put him in gaol fer rustlin'."

"You *do* plan for him to get to gaol?"

"That's the gospel truth."

"When do we call the sheriff?"

"Jes' as soon as we've got the evidence."

"You promise you're not going to kill him?"

"I do," said Zip. "I promise." He looked as if he wanted to add, *barrin' unforeseeable circumstances*, but he didn't.

"You understand, Zip. This is for Ma."

"Sure, Tom. Course I understan'."

When we got to Conroy's we saw a long, low, cement-block building with plate-glass windows in one end. There was a large sign under the eaves: CONROY'S PACKING CO. and under this: MEAT AT WHOLESALE PRICES. There were extensive stockyards behind the building.

I glanced at the steer in the back. "You knew he was a butcher even before you had Sandy phone, didn't you?"

"Use your head," said Zip. "You an' me an' anybody on a

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ranch knows how to butcher a beef. Some of us git purty good at it. But none of us butchers enough beef in a lifetime to git as good as this here Conroy."

What a set-up, I thought. A legitimate meat-processing plant where legally bought stock was constantly being slaughtered. How easy to slip in three or four rustled beeves a week. Sold across the counter, they were worth plenty.

Zip was squinting at the vehicles parked in front of the building. "Is that it?" he asked, pointing to a truck.

It had the correct number. "Yes," I said.

"Go see if he left his rifle in it."

I walked over and, after making sure no one was watching, stuck my head through the open window. There was no rifle visible. I pulled the back of the seat forward, and the rifle hung in a clever rack above where the tools lay. I went back and informed Zip.

"Go in and git Conroy," said Zip. "Tell 'im you got a prime beef out here to sell him. I'll be settin' here in the truck. Bring 'im right up to me."

"Don't forget your promise."

"Don't worry," said Zip.

I went in the meat-market end of the building. There were a few customers, and the meat cutter was behind the counter. "Where's Conroy?" I asked as if I had been there before.

The meat cutter motioned to the door behind him. "Out back."

A smell of fertiliser assailed me as I went through the door. There were twelve freshly butchered sides of beef hanging from hooks attached to rollers on long overhead tracks. A man was pushing two of these sides toward an open refrigerator door. He was about thirty years old, tall and broad. He had curly black hair.

"You Conroy?" I asked. I didn't like his face.

He pushed the sides into the refrigerator, came out, shot me an insolent look, and took hold of two more sides. "Yeah."

"I've got a corn-fattened two-year-old out in my truck I'd like to sell you."

He pushed the beef into the refrigerator and came out. "Belong to you?"

"I said it did."

"Got a bill of sale?"

"It's got my brand on it."

"What do you want for it?"

"Whatever you're giving."

"Jones," he yelled. A young man with bloody hands came in.

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" Finish putting these in the cooler." Conroy pointed to the remaining sides of beef.

We went out. I indicated our truck with the steer in back. As we walked, I let him get a half stride ahead of me. If he started anything, I intended to tackle him before Zip could shoot him. As we approached, Conroy's eyes were all for the steer; he didn't seem to notice Zip sitting in the cab. Then, as he came abreast of Zip, three things stopped him. There was a Bar Z brand painted on the pickup door. He'd seen that brand yesterday on the beef he was stealing. There was the black maw of a .45 pointing at him out of the window. Above the .45 was a pair of the coldest blue eyes he had ever seen. Of the three things that stopped him, it was Zip's eyes more than the .45 that tamed him.

" You'll drive," Zip said to him evenly and kicked the door open. Conroy, pale now and tense, got behind the wheel as Zip slid to the far side. I closed the door.

" Drive his truck," Zip said to me. " Follow us."

" Don't make a wrong move," I said to Conroy. " He'll kill you, and I don't want it on his conscience."

We went west for thirty miles, then turned north on a gravel road that headed towards our place. When we came to Summers' General Store, the pickup ahead of me pulled in and stopped. I pulled up behind them, got out, and went up to the driver's side. Conroy looked sullenly straight ahead.

" Now," said Zip gaily, " you kin phone the sheriff. Tell 'im you an' me caught a rustler. Tell 'im I'm holdin' the rustler over the north side of Horseshoe Ridge while you've come to phone."

" Horseshoe is fifteen miles from here," I said. ' It'll take him a spell to get there. Sure you don't want to pick some place closer? "

" If the sheriff leaves town now, he'll git here about the time we git to Horseshoe. The time it'll take 'im to git fum here to there will be jes' about enough, I figger."

I shrugged. I still hadn't quite figured out what he intended to do, but I was proud of him for keeping his word and phoning the sheriff. I went in and, luckily, caught the sheriff in his office.

" Sheriff, this is Tom Zipson. Dad and I caught a rustler over north of Horseshoe Ridge. Dad's holding him there while I've come to phone."

" What! " yelled the sheriff. " You left Fred Zipson alone with a rustler? You get back out there before Zip kills him! "

I heard him roaring for his car as he hung up. I went out to Zip. " He's on his way."

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" Fine," he said. " Let's go." He nudged Conroy with the .45, so that he would drive on.

When we got to Horseshoe, Sandy was there with our saddled horses. I took Conroy's rifle from its rack, levered a cartridge into the chamber, got out and walked over and stood a few yards from the truck on his side. Zip ordered him out, and I covered him while Zip got out on the other side.

" All right, Sandy," said Zip, " skedaddle with the truck."

Sandy unloaded the steer and got in the truck. He was looking at Conroy curiously. " Sure wish I could stay an' see the fun."

" Wish you could too," said Zip. " But all we need here is Conroy's truck an' our saddle horses."

As Sandy pulled away, Zip moved Conroy from under my gun. " That Conroy's rifle? " he asked me.

" Yes."

" Drop that steer with it."

I did as I was told.

" All right, expert," Zip said to Conroy, " go to work on it."

I took Conroy's knives from his workbox in the back of his truck and handed them to him. He took them, but hesitated.

Zip cocked his .45. " I'm gonna give you a chance in a minute. If you want to live long enough to git it, you better do as you're told."

At that moment I should have been listening carefully, but I wasn't.

Conroy went to work, bleeding, gutting, skinning. When he was half finished, Zip said, " That's enough."

Conroy rose, bloody to the elbows.

" Wipe that rifle," Zip said to me.

I took my handkerchief and wiped off my fingerprints.

" Now give it here," said Zip.

I hesitated; then I made a big mistake. I handed the rifle to Zip. " I left the empty in the chamber," I said. " But the magazine is full. All he's got to do is lever one in."

" He kin never work the lever as fast as I kin pull the trigger," said Zip.

It was true, and I knew we had to get Conroy's fingerprints on the rifle. Then Zip tossed the rifle to him.

Conroy had no choice but to catch it, and just then the full significance of all we had done hit home. We were in the middle of Zip's range. Our two horses waited obediently, apparently where we had left them after having ridden up on him. Conroy's truck with its winch and bloody tarpaulin in the back stood there guiltily. There were the day-old remains of a butchered beef. There was a freshly killed, half-butchered beef with a bullet

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from his rifle in it. There was blood all over him, and now his fingerprints were on the rifle.

I was just thinking proudly how clever Zip was and how honestly he was carrying out his promise when he calmly let down the hammer of his .45 and holstered it. Now he and Conroy were even. One had to lever a rifle, the other had to draw.

"You got a choice," said Zip. "A spell in the pen, or shoot your way out."

At precisely that moment all three of us heard the sheriff's car in the distance. I was furious at Zip, but I didn't dare make a move for fear of triggering what still might not come off. Conroy was as white as a tanned man can be. Zip stood there as motionless as a panther by a game trail, his hands hanging easily at his sides.

For a moment it seemed unreal to me. The sun was bright and warm and Horseshoe Ridge rose before us majestic and beautiful. There the three of us stood, not six feet separating us, hemmed in by all that vastness and beauty, but pinpointed in a drama started by the greed of a thief and being finished by a code of ethics from another era.

The whine of the engine of the sheriff's car was clearly audible, although it was not yet in sight. For Conroy it was now or never. Suddenly he flicked the lever of his rifle. Zip's hand disappeared into blur and the blur became explosion. Conroy was whirled and knocked flat, the half-levered rifle flying through the air. The bullet had caught him in the upper arm, shattering the bone. I looked at him writhing in shock. In the near distance, out of the tail of my eye, I saw the sheriff's car boiling dust. I knelt and cut Conroy's shirt away and began trying to stop the bleeding.

"Damn you, Zip," I said as I worked. "You promised."

"I promised not to kill him—" he turned to Conroy—"which is a considerable concession."

"You didn't have to set it up like that," I said.

Zip holstered his gun. "Had to git his fingerprints. I couldn't he'p it if he started in to use it."

"You could have had me take out the cartridges."

He looked past me with his comical blue eyes to the sheriff's car skidding to a frantic stop. "Dammit all, Tom, who ever heard of a rustler packin' an unloaded gun?"

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He who speaks the truth must have one foot in the stirrup.
Chinese proverb

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LILAC DAYS

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd . . .
WALT WHITMAN

Lilacs,
False blue,
White,
Purple,
Colour of lilac,
Your great puffs of flowers
Are everywhere in this my New England.
Among your heart-shaped leaves
Orange orioles hop like music-box birds and sing
Their little weak soft songs;
In the crooks of your branches
The bright eyes of song sparrows sitting on spotted eggs
Peer restlessly through the light and shadow
Of all Springs.

AMY LOWELL, *Lilacs*

Planting by Moonlight

His shovel rose and fell; cutting the soft topsoil, cutting the gritty sand, hacking through the stretched vital roots of the poplars. As fast as he dug the holes, the moonlight filled them; exactly as the holes scooped on a beach fill with the sea. Cold roots, cold soil, cold sand—his hands, pressing down the lilac roots, disentangling and spreading the living radicles, clawing the mixed sand and loam over them, became themselves cold and earthlike . . . A purple, a white, a purple again, a pink. Who ever heard of a pink lilac? Must be a façon de parler. By god, what a sight they would be when they all blossomed! The House of a Hundred Lilacs, they could call it, with engraved purple notepaper . . .

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" Not much blossom next spring—"

" No? "

" No, they'll want about a year's growth of wood first, and to make some roots too—but then, by gorry, they'll give you blaze enough—it ought to be a pretty sight. Got 'em in just in time, too—I can feel the frost in my sciatics already! "

They looked together along the row of lilacs by the Purington fence, as orderly as if they had been there forever. A patch of white sand glowed dimly at the foot of each, like a little circle of phosphorescence, and the dangling labels, too, shone white in the moonlight. Terence shook his head.

" A hundred! " he said.

" Felt more like a thousand! "

CONRAD AIKEN, *Conversation*

Lilac Song

When the lilacs were blooming in Bloomsbury Square
How happy we were eating sandwiches there.
With the sparrows chirping
And the pigeons cooing
We were happy as the day is long—
There was song
In the air . . .
When the lilacs were blooming in Bloomsbury Square
How happy we were eating sandwiches there.

ANON

Forest of Lilacs

The garden, where Blondine rode in her little carriage drawn by ostriches, with Gormandinet for coachman, was separated by a palisade from a huge and magnificent forest which was called the Forest of Lilacs, since all the year round it was full of lilac trees in flower. Nobody went into this forest; it was known to be enchanted; should anyone enter it, he would never come out again. Gormandinet knew the terrible power of this forest; he had been severely forbidden ever to drive Blondine's carriage that way, lest by mischance Blondine should pass through the wicket and enter the Forest of Lilacs . . .

" Oh, what beautiful lilacs! " cried Blondine. " What a sweet scent! How I should love a big bunch to give to Papa . . ."

And saying these words she jumped nimbly out of the carriage, climbed over the gate, and started to pick the lilacs.

MME LA COMTESSE DE SEGUR, *Histoire de Blondine*

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Thou art not lovelier than lilacs,—no,
Nor honeysuckle; thou art not more fair
Than small white single poppies,—I can bear
Thy beauty, though I bend before thee, though
From left to right, not knowing where to go,
I turn my troubled eyes, nor here nor there
Find any refuge from thee, yet I swear
So has it been with mist,—with moonlight so.

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

Pink on Lilac

"Well, scarves," said Victoria, moving her cigarette in a small deprecating arc. "They can look pretty much alike, don't you think? Particularly at dusk?"

"We bought this one together, at that little place on Sea Street," said Simon. His face was puzzled. "The woman had stocked only a few of them and Lilac got the last. It was one of those squares, silk and wool I think, imported from somewhere, with a handful of gold sequins in one corner. Pink. On Lilac it was—"

Yes, thought Victoria, it would have been. Lilac with her straight glossy black hair, her bold, gay pirate's face, her polished light grey eyes—and a shy cool pink coif to bring it all into sharper focus.

URSULA CURTISS, *The Second Sickle*

I remember, I remember,
The roses, red and white,
The violets and the lily-cups,
Those flowers made of light!
The lilacs where the robin built,
And where my brother set
The laburnum on his birthday,—
The tree is living yet!

THOMAS HOOD

Lilac and Yellow

Servants parted the curtains and the Yellow Empress, bowing right and left, swept the length of the ballroom and took her place at the head of the formed procession. The great open dancing pavilion was draped with yellow silk caught up with lilac flowers. Every corner was filled with bloom of those colours. The music was played by harpers dressed in yellow and violet, and the ball opened.

GENE STRATTON PORTER, *A Girl of the Limberlost*

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NIGHT OUT

The twenty-guinea faces were not amused. They glared truculently

BY DUFF HART-DAVIS

"YOU'RE not bringing *him*, are you?" said Alan. "For goodness' sake."

"Well, what else can I do? I can't leave him here. He might run amok—jump out of the window or something."

"Shut him up somewhere—in the kitchen."

"I can't risk that. Kate'd kill me if anything happened to him. He's worth hundreds of pounds."

"Thousands, I should think. He will be, specially when he's been put in the nick. What are you going to do with him?"

"He'll be all right. I'll keep him under my coat. Hey, Yam, where are you, lad?"

I gave a double whistle, and Yam came scuttling through from the sitting-room, doing a neat four-paw drift on the corner and arriving under my arm in one jump.

"Lively little blighter, anyway," said Alan grudgingly. He was right. Yam—Tsarong Yamdrok II, officially, but Yam to his friends—is a real ball of fire: short, square (a bit sawn-off looking, really), sandy and a sport, with long hair and little pointed ears and an endearing habit of holding his head cocked on one side while waiting for instructions.

If you didn't know that he's practically *the* original Tibetan Yak Harrier you might write him off as the result of private enterprise between a Sealyham and a Yorkshire terrier. That would be a mistake, because as far as Kate's concerned, he's absolutely Top Canine.

She's always been crazy about him anyway, and since he won at Cruft's nothing's been too good for him. She's even taught him to retrieve. Not game, of course—he'd probably bolt if he met a pheasant—but things more his size, like matchboxes and reels of cotton.

Yet in spite of all the pampering he gets, he's as tough as old boots. That being so, I saw no reason why he shouldn't come to the cinema with us.

To tell you the truth, I was altogether a bit narked with Kate.

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For a start, she was going out with this American businessman. She more or less *had* to, I know—she works in a public relations agency, and it was part of an assignment—but that didn't make it any better.

Then she'd had the nerve to ask to borrow my car for the evening, and I'd been soft enough to lend it to her. Finally, she'd parked Yam on me for the night.

Not that I minded having Yam: he and I get along very well. But when two five-guinea tickets for a premiere had landed free on my desk at lunchtime that day, I'd seen straight away that there was only one thing to do. It wasn't that I wanted to take it out on Yam; but I couldn't help feeling that a little mickey-taking, via Yam, might be beneficial.

"He'll be all right," I said to Alan again. "But I tell you what we'll do—dope him."

It seemed a brilliant idea. We slipped him half an aspirin inside a peppermint cream, and by the time we were in Alan's car he was fast asleep.

At first everything went fine. There was the usual crowd of gawpers outside the cinema, but they hardly noticed us, as we swanned in merrily behind an amazing creature, with mauve hair, who looked as though she'd made her debut in about 1908. I had Yam under my coat, and once we had found our seats at the back of the stalls I settled him on the floor under my knees, with my coat draped over him in a little tent.

We were amusing ourselves with a bit of idle celebrity-spotting when I saw something that gave me quite a turn. I must have gone a bit white, because Alan suddenly asked if I was feeling all right.

"Down that gangway," I said. "In a blue dress."

"Kate," said Alan brilliantly.

Kate it was, looking terrific, with her hair up and a crew-cut in tow.

"Keep down," I muttered, slumping in my seat. "And tell me where they settle."

"O.K.," said Alan a moment later. "They've touched down—on the far right."

"Wow!" I surfaced cautiously. "She might have told me she was coming here! Thank God, she's shortsighted. She'd slaughter me if she knew Yam was with us."

I gave Yam a reassuring pat and began to unwind again. There wasn't much to worry about, in fact, as we were in the back row but two, and would easily be able to slip out at the end.

Presently the lights went down and the film began, and I gradually stopped thinking about either Yam or Kate. But

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suddenly there was an upheaval just in front of us: a blowzy artificial blonde leapt round in her seat and bellowed at her neighbour, "If you do that again, young man, I'll report you to the manager!"

The youth was one of the smoothest I've seen—all Brigade accent and jokey eyebrows. He raised one of them: "My dear good woman, what *are* you talking about?"

"Stroking my leg!" she cried. "Twice!"

"No such luck, old girl," he said coldly. "I wouldn't if I was paid."

It was obviously true, and the blonde knew it. She began to screech with frustration, and a few people turned and glared. I was all set to enjoy a proper showdown when a thought struck me—Yam! I made a dive for him, but it was too late.

I began to grope about under the seats in front. Normally he was pretty obedient, but not then. I started writhing with apprehension, waiting for loud bits in the sound track and whistling and cursing under my breath. The people next to me began to bristle.

"Sorry!" I gasped, coming up for air. "Gripe!" I doubled up again and clicked until both thumbs were ruptured. It was useless: Yam was away.

The blonde simmered down after a while, but then there was a second eruption, about five rows in front and slightly to our left. A man shot to his feet with a healthy curse, then subsided, rootling under his seat. The next eruption was still more to the left—a big one: about six people airborne simultaneously, all swearing and thrashing at their ankles with rolled-up programmes and umbrellas.

In a few minutes they were going up and down like yo-yos. I could plot Yam's progress from the eruptions: he was moving steadily across the slope in a left-handed arc. Then he seemed to steady up and go into an elliptical orbit right in the middle of the most expensive seats. A whole ring of people were on their feet together, and a general altercation broke out. From where we were only parts of it were audible:

"GET THE MANAGER!" shouted a hysterical woman's voice. "There's a *cat* in the place!"

"Cat?" called a man. "It's more like a *rat*. Wait till you see what it's done to my ankle."

"Disgusting, I call it," cried another woman. "My shoe's *full*!"

Gradually the disturbance spread until it was attracting more attention than the screen, and suddenly the film cut and the house lights went on.

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"Now he's had it," I groaned. "Think of it—three hundred quids' worth being trampled by all those bloody feet!"

Alan, who had been paralysed with laughter, at last pulled himself together. "You go over there and see if you can collar him," he whispered. "I'll stay here in case he comes back."

I struggled along our row and into the nearest gangway, at the crouch the whole way so as to keep out of Kate's view. A few rows down was a podgy man in a brown pinstripe suit who knew all the answers. He had put himself in charge of the situation and was trying to organise a drive through the twenty-guinea stalls.

"What is it?" a flustered woman demanded.

"A cat," he announced. "A ruddy great black cat."

"It's *not* black," said someone indignantly. "It's yellow. I saw it."

"I don't care *what* colour it is," snapped another woman. "It's ruined my stockings and it's had my chocolates. Why don't you *do* something about it instead of standing there arguing?"

"All right, madam, all right," said Brown Suit loftily. "I'm doing my best. Come on! Clear these rows! All you people—on your feet! It's under you somewhere."

The twenty-guinea faces were not amused. They glared at him, slightly bemused but truculent. They weren't moving.

He began to lose his temper, and in doing so roused the sporting instincts of one or two of the younger men, who stood up and peered about them, shouting "Hi-yup!" and "There he goes!" as they brought their heavy commemorative programmes smartly down across their expensive neighbours' knees.

As a rumpus it was glorious, but it was making me frantic. I dodged up and down the ends of the rows, trying in vain to spot Yam among all the legs. By then he had perfected a technique of nipping back and forth between the rows instead of running along them, so that no one could get a line on him.

Just as Brown Suit was really beginning to sweat, a thin-faced, dapper little man with hair slicked flat came up and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Would you kindly stop making such a noise?" he asked, none too politely. "You're causing a disturbance."

"*Causing* a disturbance! I like that. And who might you be, pray?"

"Simmonds, the name is. I'm manager of this theatre."

"Ah, the manager!" Brown Suit's aspirates went to pieces with the excitement. "The manager, eh? There's only one thing I want to hask you. Do you *normally* 'ave wild hanimals hat large in your picture house? That's all I want to know."

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The argument flared again, and just as someone was hoisting a savaged Achilles tendon into view as proof of the presence of a fox, a long whistle reached me though the din. I looked up, and there was Alan, with one hand curled up on to his head in the " Close on me " position.

I was up that gangway in two seconds flat. " Under my coat," he muttered as I reached him, and we took off through a side exit, our feet barely touching. As soon as we reached a street lamp clear of the building we hoisted Yam for an inspection.

He was fine—everything in order, except that he was holding something in his mouth. He had the devil of a grip of it, but eventually I managed to prise his jaws open, and out came a whole bunch of keys.

" Someone's going to miss those," said Alan a shade guiltily. " Maybe I'd better take them back."

" Yes," I said, " the trouble is that there's no means of telling who they . . . wait a *minute*, though . . ." I looked at Alan for a moment, and then at Yam. " Yam," I said, holding him up, " you're a crafty little brute, but I'm afraid that this time you may have done us a mischief."

He knew perfectly well what I was saying. He gave me a bit of a sideways look, and was sick all down the front of my dinner-jacket—a whole pound of chocolates, by the look of it.

Next morning it was in all the papers. PREMIERE RUMPUS, they said; *Mystery Animal Stops Show.* Apparently the cinema had been cleared by the police, and several customers had turned ugly.

As I got breakfast ready—we'd arranged that Kate would come round for breakfast to pick Yam up—I rehearsed various opening gambits. There was nothing for it, obviously, but to play it by ear: if Kate *had* seen him, she had, if she hadn't, she hadn't. It was as simple as that. I should soon know.

I knew as soon as I opened the door to let her in, before either of us had spoken. I'd never seen her look so miserable. She perked up as Yam bounded into her arms, but only for a moment.

" Well," I began jovially, " what's up with you? Didn't you have a wonderful evening with your millionaire? "

" No, I did *not*," she said—not viciously, not sarcastically, but just plain miserably. " He wasn't gorgeous, or a millionaire. And we had a perfectly awful time."

" Come on! It can't have been *that* bad."

" It was. For a start we only saw about a quarter of the film before the whole thing packed up. Some animal had got into the cinema or something, and they had to stop the show."

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" Oh, so you went to the premiere, did you? "

" Yes—how did you know? "

" It's here," I said, pointing at the paper. " I've just been reading about it. What happened? "

" I don't know—people started jumping up and down shouting that they'd been bitten, until there was complete chaos and they had to stop the film. They think a cat got in."

" You should have had Yam with you. He'd have seen it off. Wouldn't you, Boyo? "

Kate grinned for a second, then looked anxious again.

" Anyway," she went on wearily, " we all had to troop out, and, darling—I don't know how to tell you this, it's so awful, but I . . . I lost your keys! "

I managed to glower into my coffee cup for a minute without saying anything.

" I don't know *how* it happened," she babbled on. " The only thing I can think of is that I must have dropped them from my bag when I was fishing out money for cigarettes on the way to our seats. We went back and hunted all round where we'd been sitting, but there wasn't a sign of them.

" So then of course I couldn't open the car, and we couldn't find a taxi either, so we had to walk miles in the rain to an all-night garage for another key. Mr. Wellenberger was livid—"

She broke off and looked at me imploringly.

" Really," I said sternly. " You oughtn't to be allowed out on your own."

" I know. I couldn't be more sorry. But what'll you do about the keys? "

" Oh," I said lightly, " don't worry about them—a friend returned them to me."

" A friend? " Kate's jaw dropped almost into her scrambled eggs. " Someone I know? "

Yam, who had perched on a spare chair and was fielding minute pieces of bacon, turned to me and gave a crafty wink.

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EARTHFALL

We're capsuled and in your lovely hands, sweetheart. Don't drop us, will you

BY STEWART FARRAR

MARY shrugged clumsily into her uniform jacket as she crossed the chilly office, mouthing and grimacing to try to get rid of the small-hours taste on her tongue. The thin sea mist had ignored the closed windows; it haloed the lights Mary had just switched on, and she hurried to switch on the electric fires, too. Even Queen Elizabeth II in her official frame, and the Squadron cricket eleven in their only slightly less official one, looked relieved at the promising twang of the power switch. Mary skirted the C.O.'s desk, picked up a notebook from her own and pressed the curtain-button.

The room-wide curtains behind the desks purred open like the tabs of a theatre, revealing the chorus-girl faces of the cathode ray tubes, the random sequins of telltale lamps, the bosomy control dials; in the wings, the digital infallibility of Compo, waiting to coordinate his company and delve into his memory-banks if a prompt were needed.

What, no opening number? Mary thought—not for the first time.

"One for us?" the C.O. asked from the door.

"Oh, hullo, Harvey. Tobermory think so."

"No R/T yet?"

Mary glanced at a slowly sweeping needle, and told him, "They're still scanning for frequency. They'll put us through when they've got anything."

Group-Captain Harvey Macleod stood behind her, an arm across her shoulders. Mary stroked his hand briefly, and then said, "Look, there's the trace."

"Enough to check the rate?"

Mary spun a dial, centring the break on the hairline of its tube. "Sixty-five per cent C, decreasing . . ."

"Well, if it *is* for us, it'll be a Mark Twelve A or B. Twelve A was the first with Gunter capsules, and if they haven't got those, they're dead."

"*Someone's* alive—she's under control. Sixty-three . . . We

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haven't had a Mark Twelve since Christmas. Should be interesting. Sixty-two . . . Bet you anything she's a Heinniger. Dunvegan have all the luck these days."

"You still call it luck?"

"Yes, I do. Sixty . . ."

"I don't know if it's maternalism or masochism in you."

"Both, I expect."

A loudspeaker started to hum, and they looked up at it, waiting.

"*Tobermory to Seventies. Dutying schon?*" the loudspeaker asked.

"Seventies to Tobermory. Dutying," Mary told it.

"*Incomer locked R/T-wise. Overtake?*"

"Overtake."

The loudspeaker changed abruptly to egg-frying atmospherics, mingled with a voice that gabbled like a soprano machine-gun. Macleod reached and turned down the volume.

"Still too much Doppler effect for sense. Try him with a half-speed call when he pauses."

Mary nodded, sliding her chair towards a tape deck. She ran the tape at fifteen inches per second and dictated, "Hullo, spaceship. Hullo, spaceship. We are receiving you, but your transmission is still too fast. Try again when you're in orbit. Over." She ran the tape back, switched to seven and a half, and replayed it through the transmitter, smiling at the laboured groan of her own voice an octave below normal.

It was about twelve seconds before the answer came, still a gabble, but with a new and unmistakable flavour to it. Macleod and Mary grinned at each other.

"Doppler effect plus frantic excitement," he said.

"Does that still surprise you, Harvey?"

"I've too good a memory . . . The poor homesick bastards."

Mary made no comment, but turned up the loudspeaker volume. It now had nothing to offer but the egg-frying, and they watched the monitors intently.

"Almost in orbit," Macleod said. "Their navigation's bang on, I must say. I'm damn sure it's a Mark Twelve . . . I wonder if Compo would know yet?"

"You could try him."

Macleod took Mary's notebook to the computer keyboard and started typing. When he had finished, Mary went on, "I think you're right, you know, Harvey. Nothing earlier would brake in kilo-G's, or have that much control. And a Heinniger would orbit closer in."

"That's my bet . . . Here comes Compo's answer."

The teleprinter chattered a couple of lines and fed the paper

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out. "I *was* right, too!" Macleod cried. "*Data indicate Swinburne Mark Twelve with Pinkerton Drive, probably Series B,* it says."

"Good old emotion-free Compo."

"Well, according to Pete Barlow at Dunvegan, *his* Compo has bouts of jealousy."

"You must remember to call 'em gremlins, Harvey. And talking of gremlins, if Compo's right and this *has* a Pinkerton Drive—"

"Poppa and Momma have work to do."

"How right you are! D'you remember that one last year, with—"

The loudspeaker cut her short. "*Hullo, Earth! Hullo, Earth! Centauri Probe* 68 *calling Earth! Centauri Probe* 68 *calling Earth—come in, please!*"

Macleod was already rattling the keyboard as Mary answered, "Hullo, Centauri Probe 68—hullo, Centauri Probe 68. This is R.A.F. Treshnish Point, on the Isle of Mull—receiving you loud and clear. Welcome home! I say again, welcome home! Over."

"*Where d'you say, Earth? R.A.F. where? Over!*"

There was a laugh in Mary's voice as she called, "Take it easy, Centauri Probe. This is R.A.F. Station—Treshnish—Tare, Roger, Easy, Sugar, How, Nan, Item, Sugar, How—Treshnish Point—on the Isle of Mull—Mike, Uncle, Love, Love—Mull, on the west coast of Scotland." Macleod handed her a teleprinter take; she glanced at it and asked, "Is that Captain Wallace? Over . . ."

The surgeon leaned on the windowsill, his tired eyes gazing north to where Highgate just broke through the rippled white of the cloud-floor. It was quiet up here on the 204th. The scattered silver needles of London's other buildings, clean in the still air, reminded him suddenly of the tiny spires of Oxford he had known—how long ago? *They* were honey-coloured, of course, but . . . That hummock of solid ground drew his eyes again; he watched it with an odd hunger; then the dazzling floor billowed slowly over it and he was alone with the silver needles. The surgeon sighed.

He heard the door open behind him, and he turned; the Theatre Sister stood there, one knee of her white slacks slightly bent as though she hesitated to come in. The surgeon nodded and walked past her towards the theatre, angry with himself for the tightness in his throat; it would not do. Too much depended on him, and his kind, for him to be anything but a machine.

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But month after month of this, with only thirteen per cent to show for it . . . Last year it had been fifteen, and the year before eighteen; and next year? . . . Why should a little detail like a bent knee—revealing hesitancy in a known martinet—worry him?

The surgeon and the Theatre Sister paused for the regulation ten seconds between the doors of the ultrasonic steriliser, and when the light flicked to green they walked in. The theatre was bright and calm, and the moment he was in it the surgeon was himself again. The supine figure at its focus, deeply unconscious but straining with the instinctive battle of delivery, was once more an impersonal object, a technical problem. Assistant and anæsthetist murmured their reports, and he went to work.

It didn't take long, the birth itself. She was a healthy patient, rather slender, but well formed and resilient, her twenty-year-old body taking its ordained function in its stride. From the core of her mindless anæsthesia she seemed to be cooperating with the surgeon, willing him towards their joint success. His own mind, too tensely compartmented to notice the irony, observed a normal birth . . . The boy-child was in his hands, and the real fight began; his concentration switching abruptly, the mother already his assistant's responsibility, wiped from his thoughts.

With the Sister at his elbow, he struggled fiercely for more than an hour; everything he or she knew, every possible resource of the hospital's vast equipment, and finally every last hundred-to-one trick that had ever been known to work.

He knew it was hopeless long before he told them to take the child away. There had hardly been so much as a spark for him to fan.

In the steriliser, his nerves were so ragged he almost believed he could hear the ultrasonic hiss while he waited for the green light.

"Well, at least the old place doesn't seem to have blown herself up while we've been away," Captain James Wallace, S.N., remarked cheerfully, his rather piratical features looking even more so than usual, as he twisted his face trying to look sideways through the observation port. "Roll her a bit, will you, Bob? Say ten degrees clockwise. I can almost see Ireland."

Lieutenant Robert Prescott, engineer and biologist, acknowledged and turned to the control panel. The observation port slid away from Wallace as the ship's attitude altered, and he kicked and swam with a single practised movement to catch up with it.

"That do, Skip?"

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" Yuh, that's fine . . . Boy, that must be Dublin! What do you think, Lew? "

Commander Lewis Green, mate, geologist, and the only other member of Centauri Probe 68's company, floated across to look, and decided in his laconic Jamaican baritone, " Belfast. There's Lough Neagh and Strangford Lough, on each side of it."

" The man's right, you know. Got some shiny new buildings, by the look of it. Though at this altitude I'm guessing . . . Once more round the houses'll do us, then. That popsie on Mull knows her stuff. Back in your hutches, everybody."

They snaked into the mummy-cases of their Gunter capsules—Green and Prescott into the smaller ones which merely had intercom and emergency controls, and Wallace into the bulbous master capsule with its miniature duplicate monitors and console. The captain waited for the two reports: " Sealed . . . Sealed . . ." added his own, and switched in the Gunter field, hearing the other two grunt as the strange more-than-weightlessness took over, and he knew they could now stand any acceleration, positive or negative, up to a theoretical maximum of infinity-minus-one-G—that in fact the capsules would go sailing on even after the hull had disintegrated; a possibility they had long ago grown bored with joking about. His " God bless our boffins " had also long ceased to be a joke, and become a kind of formal grace, not to be skipped. He pronounced it now.

He watched his monitors till he judged Mull was edging over the horizon for the last time, and started hailing R.A.F. Treshnish Point, feeling and sharing the excitement of his crew as they waited again for the first woman's voice they had heard in four years—four *subjective* years, anyway, plus whatever the Time Dilation Effect had added. Still hard to grasp, that; but the boffins—and Lew, whom he trusted more—had assured him it worked. Four years by their hearts and watches, but if they'd logged their near-to-light speeds correctly, more like ten by the Earth calendar.

" Not only are there more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, but they can't even keep in time," he mused aloud. " I bet Hamlet never thought of that one."

" Say again, Skipper? " Bob's voice wanted to know, and he heard Lew chuckle. Lew *would* get it first time, of course.

" Never mind," he answered. " Centauri Probe 68 calling R.A.F. Treshnish Point. Can you hear me? Over."

" *Treshnish Point to Centauri Probe . . .*" (Oh, that golden two-breasted voice!) "*. . . loud and clear. We are ready to bring you in. Are you capsuled? I say again, are you capsuled? Over.*"

" Centauri Probe to Treshnish Point. We're capsuled and

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in your lovely hands, sweetheart. Don't drop us, will you? Over."

"*Treshnish Point to Centauri Probe. Wilco, and thanks for the flowers, but stick to drill now, please. Alter course azimuth minus one degree one-owe minutes. Over.*"

Wallace busied himself with the attitude controls, nicely judged his correcting boost, and replied, "Centauri Probe to Treshnish Point. Azimuth minus one degree one-owe minutes... set. Over."

"*Treshnish Point to Centauri Probe. Decelerate three point seven G's, started ninety seconds from . . . now . . .*"

Rank upon rank of dull grey hulls, pointed like cathedral windows; file upon file, marshalled in orchard perspectives that reached from one horizon to the other under the wheeling sun. Sergei Petrovich Grigorev knew that if his watchtower were a hundred metres higher, he would be able to pick out the shadowy line of the Volga in the far north, and probably the Caucasus peaks to the south, too, on a clear day. He yawned and wondered, as he did often, just what was the point of guarding the things anyway. Those grey fish on their ten thousand square kilometres of fishmonger's slab were as precious to the human race as their standardised replicas on the plains of Arizona, the wide Sahara, the Gobi, and the Great Victoria Desert. The crew of an ocean vessel didn't stand guard over their lifeboats, for the most obvious of reasons. So why should Sergei be here, punctiliously scanning and patrolling, reporting and contacting, day after day, waiting for *the* day that might never come?

He'd be more usefully occupied spending his hours in his air-conditioned bungalow at the foot of the watchtower, cheering up Natasha—and God knew she could do with it, after three failures in as many years. Nothing would defeat that girl, nothing would convince her that a perennially filled womb wasn't worth the dwindling hope—or the other way round; Sergei couldn't be sure which it was that sustained her. At least they had Tanya, squealing, bouncing, bubbling little Tanya, as healthy as anyone could wish; unless Tanya, too. . . . It would be quite a few years before they knew the answer to that. But thousands, millions, had none at all—not even a Tanya to prove to themselves—whatever it was that men and women felt they had to prove.

He wondered how many of the other watchtowers, in Arizona and Sahara and Gobi and Victoria, had their Tanyas, and what they called them; and if their Natashas defied defeat as his did. By God, he hoped so . . .

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" Well, that's it," Mary said, putting down the phone. " They left Killichronan five minutes ago. If they're in the Jag they should be here in fifteen."

Macleod pushed his cap on to the back of his head and rubbed his eyes with his palms.

" Tired? " she asked.

" No—just the usual."

Mary went over and sat on the corner of his desk. " Harvey, you've been running Treshnish for three years now. Don't you think that's enough for anyone? "

Macleod said brusquely, " I'm under orders—I go where I'm posted."

" Come off it, Harvey. I've been your tame W.R.A.F. Squadron-Leader for two of those three years, and I know the score on places like this. You could go back to normal duty tomorrow, and we *both* know it."

" Would you come with me? "

" Damn silly question—sir. Jacko could take over from you and Susan from me, and . . ."

" All right, *you* come off it. This job's in our blood, and perhaps I'm as masochistic as you are."

" And as maternal? " she smiled.

He returned the smile. " I guess so. But hell, someone's got to—" He stiffened, looking past Mary, and barked, " Lisa! "

Mary turned as the girl walked in; and though she, too, quenched her smile she found it more of an effort. Sometimes I wish *I* could wear a decent, human uniform every day, she thought . . .

She looked Lisa up and down; the broad grin under the cheeky little tricorne hat; the long ponytail falling over the wide-necked blouse of Air Force blue lustre; the deep dolman sleeves, tight silver cuffs, and silver Flight-Sergeant's insignia; the brief white duck pants with the pressed turn-ups, the bare brown legs (and mine are as good as hers); the silver sandals. Oh to be normal . . .

" The morn, Harvey—Mary! Five minutes unbusy? "

" The morn, Lisa," Mary answered. " *Yes* busy, regret."

Macleod said angrily, " Because brother, think unsalute? "

" Ohoo! " Lisa mocked, and threw up a smart one. " Sorrowing, Harvey, but . . ."

Macleod touched his cap in tetchy acknowledgment, and interrupted her, " *Un*but, Lisa. Said thousandfold schon, uncome here dutygarb. Factwise, uncome here *any* garb, ere you throughlearn seventyspeak. Treshnish offlimit all personnel unseventytrained. Said thousandfold. Forget? "

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His sister looked as contrite as a spanked puppy, and muttered, " Sorrowing, Harvey."

" Well, now you *are* here," Macleod told her, his voice softening a little, " you can talk the Station language, or else. How's your homework? "

" I—beg—your pardon? " Lisa asked carefully.

" You're supposed to be learning seventyspeak, aren't you? "

" I'm trying, but it—goes slow."

" Slow-*ly*. Look, Lisa, I'm sorry, but you'll have to make yourself scarce."

Lisa looked puzzled, and Mary amended, " Hide yourself."

" Yes," Macleod said. " There's an incomer crew on the way from Killichronan. Due any moment now. If they see you, it'll wreck everything. Go on—outget! "

Lisa made for the door. " Oh *truly* sorrowing, Harvey. Untold Tobermoryward. Wait messward—O.K.? "

She saluted and disappeared—her brother bellowing after her, " Messward ungood schon—mess*kitchen*ward! " He turned to Mary. " Unpossible blob, she! Thinking send her mainlandward, soonest . . ."

" Harvey! Careful."

" Oh, blast the girl—she's got me right out of the swing of the thing."

" No, she hasn't. Just take a deep breath and relax." The phone rang and she picked it up. " Hayes here . . . Thank you. Bring them round the outside, will you, Sergeant? Lisa's on her way to the mess, and they mustn't see her . . . Right." She rang off, putting on her cap and facing Macleod. " On their way up, sir."

" Right. Better shut that curtain, hadn't you? "

Mary pressed the button and the curtains slid closed. There was a tap on the door, and the guard commander marched in.

" Captain Wallace and his officers, sir."

" Thank you, Sergeant. Good morning, gentlemen . . ."

Mary fidgeted distractedly with the dead controls, fighting to pull herself together. Through the curtains she could hear the brisk introductions, and sense Macleod's brief perplexity at her disappearance; but she was sure Bob hadn't seen her face before she slipped through the curtains. She would *have* to face him and soon; but it must be with courteous unrecognition. She breathed deeply three times, pulled her jacket unnecessarily, and stepped back into the room.

Bob Prescott gasped and cried, " *Mary!* "

They all looked at her, and she tried a puzzled smile. " I'm afraid I . . .? "

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" Squadron-Leader Mary Hayes, gentlemen," Macleod announced smoothly. " Mary, these are Captain Jim Wallace, commanding Centauri Probe 68. Commander Lew Green and Lieutenant Bob Prescott. Sit down, chaps, and forgive the informality. You'll be at Treshnish quite a while, and we'll be seeing a lot of each other. Now, Jim—"

" I think something's worrying Mr. Prescott, sir," Mary interrupted, still smiling.

" Oh? What is it, laddie? "

" Sir, I *know* Miss Hayes."

Macleod began to speak, but Mary cut in again, " May I call you Bob? I expect you're confusing me with my cousin. Second cousin, actually. She was at Cranwell in '67, and if you trained there . . ."

" That must explain it," Macleod backed her up. " Oh well, you can swop family news in the mess later. See what they'll drink, will you, Mary? All right, Jim—you'll be debriefed in detail over the next few days, but how about a quick summary to put us in the picture? "

Mary opened the cocktail cabinet—a sight which effectively distracted the space crew's attention, except for Bob Prescott, the incredulous hunger of whose eyes she tried not to avoid too obviously. When the first joyful sips of the almost-forgotten liquor had gone down, the crisis seemed past; she knew she could cope.

". . . seventh of October 1968—but you probably know that much," Wallace was saying.

" Yes, I've seen the file on your briefing."

" Quick work. Well, the Pinkerton Drive went like a dream, and I hope all the boffins have been knighted by now. There were one or two symptoms we didn't understand, but we can go over those later. And the Gunter capsules took a bit of getting used to."

" The feeling of being two people at once? "

" Oh, you've had other reports already, then? "

" A few."

" Good. Well, when we finally decelerated, there was Alpha Centauri B smack ahead, and it didn't take us long to locate A. In fact, they were smaller, brighter, and closer together than we'd expected; I don't know what had fooled the astronomers—(another already?—thanks, Mary—cheers)—anyway, we've got all the figures they want now."

" And Alpha Centauri C? "

" You know what? We never found it."

" Odd."

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"We thought so, too. But our detection instruments have limited range—that Twelve B's a honey of a ship for speed and navigation—and for automatic avoidance, thank God—but she's not exactly a mobile observatory. Something will have to be done about that."

"It has been, Jim. They were working on it when you left."

"Glad to hear it. Anyhow, we guessed it was because of its much lower luminosity that we couldn't pick up C . . ."

"Downclose, Sister," the surgeon said. "How many mornwise, wayby?"

The Sister consulted her list. "Senteen. Two Caesarian, undoubtable."

The surgeon took the list from her and scanned it. Then he nodded, handed it back to her, and walked to the window where he stood in silence, contemplating the silver needles.

"Jean," he said at last.

It was the first time he had called Sister by her Christian name in fourteen years, and she frowned—with concern, not annoyance. "Peter," she replied, gently.

"How long ongoing, this?"

He turned to face her, and she spread her fine-boned hands expressively. "Who knowing? Percentagewise, year-year, smooth curve. *Yes* predictable. Five years schon, unbaby more Earthside. Unsense hiding, Peter. But solvable somewise, believing. *I* believing, allcounts."

"You!" He smiled sadly. "Jean, Jean, ever sturdiest. Jean unquenchable. Telling me 'unsense hiding.' Telling me, Sisterwise; unaccepting, womanwise."

"So?"

"So please unchange. Hellward your smooth curve; so long Jean unquenchable, *I* yes unquenched."

"You ever unquenched," Sister told him briskly. "Now; Ward Sixwise. Ere downclose, ask looking admitted twincase . . ."

". . . by the way," Wallace interrupted himself, "what year is this?"

Macleod finished his drink and countered, "Why do you ask?"

Wallace raised his eyebrows. "Don't tell me the boffins were wrong? Lew's convinced me they can't be."

"About the Time Dilation Effect?"

"Yes."

"No, they weren't wrong."

"As I understand it," Wallace went on, "anyone who travels

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at anything approaching the speed of light experiences a stretched time scale, in relation to Earth time. O.K., so our ship, with its Pinkerton Drive, was designed to average ninety-five per cent of the speed of light. The Alpha Centauri group is 4.3 light years from Earth; but at our speed, our subjective time for the trip was eighteen months each way—so the Effect must work, mustn't it?—and we spent a year reconnoitring when we got there, as briefed. So although we've been away for four of *our* years, we know it will have been longer by Earth time." He grinned. "We also know that that's why they chose men without any family ties—and never mind Mary's second cousin. According to my calaculations—or Lew's rather, he's got that kind of mind—it should now be about 1978 on Earth. Right?"

"No," said Macleod. "Not exactly, Jim."

"Why not, sir?" Green asked, frowning.

"To hell with why not, Lew," Wallace cut in. "What year *is* it?"

"You may not like the answer," Macleod said carefully, "but I hope you won't let it throw you. We're equipped to help you find your feet—and that's why you're at Treshnish Point." He walked round the desk and took Wallace's glass, refilled it, and told him as he handed it back, "Today is the fourth of September 2197, Earth calendar."

Strange how it always strikes them dumb, Mary thought, watching the three with the same old surge of compassion. When I first came here—when I sat beside Harvey as he broke it to the first new incomers I'd met—I expected a chorus of disbelief, a moment of uproar. It didn't come. It never does. They just sit there and stare . . .

"When the Pinkerton Drive was first introduced," Macleod was saying, "it gave some very unexpected results. In the first place, it confused all existing navigation instruments as it reached maximum speed. And in the second place, those maximum speeds were far greater than we'd expected. You know what? You certainly didn't go to Alpha Centauri at all, but far beyond. Just *where*, we'll know in a couple of days when Killichronan have analysed your instruments—we've got a drill for that now. But from the time you've taken—subjective and Earth time—I can tell you it must be a double star about 110 light years from Earth; and you've been travelling at a shade over 99.9 per cent of the speed of light."

The three were still silent, absorbing it. At last Green said dryly, "No wonder it's the day after tomorrow."

"Exactly. And no wonder you couldn't find Alpha Centauri C."

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"Holy cow," Wallace whispered.

"But nothing's changed!" Prescott protested. "And Mary—"

"I'm afraid I stretched a point, Bob," Mary said. "It wasn't a second cousin, of course. But there *was* a Mary Hayes at Cranwell in 1967. The family's always been in the R.A.F. or the Space Navy."

"And nothing *has* changed—at Treshnish Point," Macleod carried on a little hurriedly. "That's the whole intention. We're a reception centre for incoming crews from the 1965–75 decade. A deliberate anachronism to make you feel at home. There are a dozen places like this—British, I mean; the Yanks and the Russians and the Chinese and the others have their own—though actually we're all under one command."

"Thank God for that, if I read the implications."

"You do, and I'll tell you about that in due course. Anyhow, most of us who run these places are incomers ourselves—otherwise we couldn't do it, of course. I was born in Inverness in 1949, left Earth in 1974, and was sitting just where you are, five years ago."

"And Mary?" Bob asked quickly.

"Leeds, 2166," she said before Macleod could answer. "The Group-Captain trained me in this job. I've never been farther than Venus." And bless Harvey for not batting an eyelid, she thought.

"But why is all this necessary?" Wallace demanded.

"If you really want to know," Macleod told him grimly, "I'll take you to visit a mental hospital where some of the first incomers are still alive. The ones who came in before places like Treshnish were set up."

"I see."

"Jim, you'll find it tough enough going even after a three months' course here—when we've crammed you with history, and taught you new manners and techniques and moral codes and ways of thought—not to mention the language. If we threw you in the deep end, within a week you'd be an acute case of what the trick-cyclists used to call trans-cultural shock."

"The language? Don't they still speak English?"

"Well, in a way." Macleod chuckled suddenly. "Mary—ask Lisa to come up, will you? Just as she is?"

This lot'll do nicely, the Mess Sergeant thought as another burst of laughter came from the C.O.'s table. Good healthy bunch, taking it in their stride already. More than *I* did, I must say; I felt like a cat that's been caught in the mangle, first

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day in. Still, that was way back, and we've learnt a thing or two since then . . . Of course, having Lisa as their first taste of the real world's a help; that girl could come in dressed as a pink rabbit and talking like Chaucer, and still have 'em all grinning in three minutes flat . . .

" When do we get a look at outside? " Wallace was asking. " Go on, tell me in that cockeyed language of yours."

Lisa twinkled. " Unknowing, Captain. Drillwise, unleave Treshnish ere psychtest. Postmonth, guessable? Norm is, day Tobermoryward; enough schon firstly."

" Well, what d'you know? I got most of that—I think."

" And *I* think," Lisa told him with halting concentration, " that it must be a—long time ere—*before* you speak it, too."

Wallace said, " You're not kidding, love," and turned to Macleod. " Harvey, if you were born in 1949—how come Lisa's your sister? "

" That's easy. My father went on a Pinkerton trip, too. A couple of them, in fact—the second a quick flip just twenty years back, Earth time," he smiled.

Wallace said, " I get your point about trans-cultural shock. I can't even count any more. Oh, brother! " He leaned back in his chair, shaking his head. " But who cares? We're talking to real live human beings for the first time in four years—or two centuries—and I wouldn't grouse if you all talked Sanskrit and grew down instead of up. The nearest thing to a sociable life-form we've met since we left was a species of—well, a kind of armoured sheep on Planet B-3; what name did you give them, Bob? "

" Quasiarmadillo something—I'd have to look it up. They were . . ."

Prescott tailed off, aware of the silence that had hit the table like a knockout punch. It was Lew Green who broke it.

" Have we said something, sir? "

All the Treshnish eyes, from the Adjutant to the smallest mess waitress, were on Macleod. He answered, in a voice deliberately controlled, " I don't know yet. Did I understand you to imply that you'd found a *habitable* planet? "

Wallace said, " But of course—three of 'em. B-2's a bit humid, but B-3 and A-2 are both Earth-type and blooming. No intelligent life, but nothing particularly vicious either."

The smallest waitress started to cry, and dropped a plate; nobody noticed her.

Macleod stood up.

" If you have finished your lunch, gentlemen," he said, " would you be good enough to come with me? "

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In Sergei Petrovich's watchtower, a bell shrilled. Sergei put down his binoculars, muttering something about bureaucrats and what he would like to do with them, and reached over to the radio panel for the microphone. His acknowledgment was crisp enough, for he was a conscientious young man and his mutterings were only a private relief from a boredom he knew to be unavoidable.

There was nothing bored about the voice from Moscow. Nor, after the first sentence, about Sergei's transfigured face.

When the message was over, Sergei ran to the balcony and burst into song, roaring it to his hundred thousand grey fish, red now with the setting sun; he roared it as he raced down the spiral emergency stairs (to hell with the lift); he roared it as he swept Tanya from the bungalow step on to his shoulder; he roared it as he hugged the astonished Natasha and waltzed her pear-shaped body round the living-room. He waltzed and wept and kissed them both till they clearly thought he was mad; and still he sang.

And from first dawn, along the orchard-lanes of grey hulls round Sergei's watchtower, and in Arizona, and in the Sahara, and in the Gobi Desert, and in Victoria, the crane limbers scurried—hauling them upright, twenty and thirty to the hour.

And on the 204th floor of the Middlesex Hospital, a surgeon delivered a pair of twins, boy and girl, who reassuringly bawled at him almost from the first breath. He smiled at Sister as he took off his mask.

"Unneed telling, unsignificant statisticwise," he said. "But this day, yes thinking—a token."

"*Two* tokens."

"Check . . . Wondering; twins are named schon?"

"Wherefore?"

"Thinking suggest motherward: Adam, Eve."

It was four o'clock in the morning at Treshnish Point when Macleod finally said, "Well, I think we've told the world all we can for today. Let's wrap it up and get some sleep. After all, we've just fired the biggest starter's pistol in all history. How does it feel?"

"So bewildering I don't know yet," Wallace replied. "Now perhaps, for a nightcap, you'll explain the rest to *us*?"

"There's nothing much left to explain. Even our geneticists can't—anyway not entirely. They *do* know it was triggered off by the Push-Pull Bomb—a nasty bit of work both sides thought up simultaneously, just after you left—nasty enough to frighten

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them at last into banning tests for good. Even so, three had gone off before the ban was agreed. And from then on, the still-birth percentage began to rise. Very slowly at first; it was almost a century before the significance of the trend was really grasped. Fifty years ago, it was double the rate of the 1960s. Ten years ago, it was seventy per cent of all births, and right now it's eighty-seven. The experts say it should reach a hundred per cent in about five years—on Earth. That's not quite as hopeless as it sounds, because births in space—or in the lunar and Martian bubble-domes—are still unaffected. Bomb-sterility, as people used to call it, is a misnomer; the effect's fœtal; mothers who conceive on Earth, and are taken into space before the sixth month, have the same chance as 1960 mothers. Even a little better."

"No—monster births?"

"Not from Earth's Push-Pull dose . . .

"The Push-Pull radiation was something new, and it seems that Earth is stuck with it . . . The boffins have been working like mad, of course; but until Centauri Probe 68 came home this morning—yesterday morning—our only hope seemed to be a shuttle-service to lunar and Martian maternity homes. Not very practical."

"But surely other Probes have found—"

"Habitable planets? Maybe, but none of the seven thousand odd who've reached home so far."

"How many others are still out?"

"I'm not sure. As many again, at least. But we were beginning to think it would never happen.

"I expect that's why I forgot my drill and didn't ask you the moment you arrived."

"But against the day when it might happen, you've been stockpiling emigrant ships?"

"Enough to lift twenty million people in the first year, while the rest build more. Not everyone's in a hurry to have babies."

"Or to leave home?" Green suggested.

Macleod inclined his head. "That too, but it'll pass—when home, in human terms, is somewhere else." He was silent for a moment, and then said, "I think it won't be long before Earth is a sort of cosmic Acropolis; people will come here to marvel, and to say, 'This is where it all began'—and then to hurry home. After all, the Acropolis has been sterile, too, for centuries now."

This time the silence was longer.

"For my money," Prescott broke it by saying, "a family can

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wait. I've been away from home for—well, however long you call it—and I want to give it a long long good-bye." He was looking at Mary. "I want to paint the town red before it's just something in the guidebooks."

Wallace and Macleod glanced at each other. "I shouldn't bank on it, Bob," Wallace said.

Prescott sat up. "Why the hell not, Skipper?"

Green said, "Think, man," and there was sadness in his voice.

Wallace said, "Yes... When does the exodus start, Harvey?"

"The drill's so cut and dried it could start in a week. They won't waste any time—if only to get the five-month pregnancies away, and *they'll* have to be well diluted, so to speak. Can't have more than five per cent, say, of the expedition giving birth on the way... No, Bob, the balloon's up, I'm afraid."

"So?" Prescott challenged aggressively.

"Oh, for God's sake, Bob," Wallace snapped. "A billion people want out—and you and I and Lew are the only suckers who can show 'em the key of the door. Take 'em on a Cook's tour of their new garden and tell 'em which flowers they can pick and which fish'll give 'em tummy-ache... Good-bye Piccadilly, farewell Leicester Square—it was nice seeing you once in a couple of hundred years—that is, if we're allowed a forty-eight before the bus starts... Right, Harvey? We ship out with the first batch and gen 'em up on the way?"

Macleod spread his hands helplessly.

Wallace laughed. "Sorry, Harvey. I'm a bad-tempered old sailor who feels cheated of his shore leave. Bed, I think. We may be busy tomorrow."

They all stood up, awkwardly. Macleod said, "Show them their rooms, will you, Lisa?"

Prescott hesitated in the doorway, and asked, "Will you and Mary be coming away too, sir?"

"I doubt it, Bob. There's a lot of work for us on Earth yet. I expect Lisa will, though. She's got a degree in astrophysics."

Prescott looked at Mary, and then at Lisa, who twinkled at him. He smiled back at her, a little uncertainly.

The lights went out, but Mary stayed by the big window, watching the far sweep of the lighthouse at the north end of Coll. Macleod came and stood behind her. She leaned back against him, within his arms.

"*Were* you his Mary?" he asked quietly.

"A long time ago... Poor Bob."

He said nothing, and she went on, "I wonder what they're like—those new planets?"

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" We'll see them one day."

" And our children? "

" Yes, please."

" But not till we've trained new people to take over here, to Harvey Macleod's satisfaction."

" That's right, Mary. I'm afraid not till then. There'll be ships coming in from the seventies for ages yet."

There was a pause, and when Mary spoke she had a wild edge to her voice.

" And there has to be *someone* to tell them—' the human race went thataway '. . ."

She twisted in his arms and began to sob against his tunic, while the lighthouse blinked on her dark hair.

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Q THIS SIDE

Q is for Question, for Query, for Quiz, so here's a batch of Q-problems to test your acuity. Much kudos for 17 correct answers; if you rise as high as 14 you're well up in your P's and 1.Q's. Solutions on page 84.

1. *Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant . . . nearly everyone can quote the John Masefield poem this far, but where did the quinquireme hail from?*
   And where was she bound?
2. *Quisling came to be a generic term for someone who collaborated with the Germans. In which country did it originate?*
3. *What do the letters Q.E.F. stand for?*
4. *Can you name the authors who created these characters?*
   a. Quilp
   b. Quasimodo
   c. Captain Queeg
   d. Quince, and Mistress Quickly
   e. Mr. Quiverful
   f. Quoodle
5. *Being Put to the Question has a harmless enough ring, but what, in fact, did it entail?*
6. *What is a quarrel when it is not a dispute?*
7. *The Canadian quins—can you give their surname?*
8. *What are, a. Q-boats; b. the Q-Department?*
9. *Who was " Q "?*
10. *Can you tell the difference between a Peacock and a Cucumber?*

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The guests are met, the feast is set:
May'st hear the merry din.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

"Ah, Sarah!" said she, "a wedding, when it *is* a wedding, takes the eye! With the half-dozen bridesmaids giggling, the mothers fighting each other like wild cats, the bridegroom champing to be off (ours champed terrible when I was wed. A meek manner had ours, but a great sperrit). There's bridegroom hollering for coachman; and coachman lashing up, very fresh; and even parson a bit fresh—leastways in the olden days."

MARY WEBB, *The House in Dormer Forest*

Mad Glad Rags

What shall I wear to the wedding
Billy my own sweet lad?
You have your apron and gown,
If you think it is good.
Shall I wear nothing that's finer
Billy my own sweet lad?
Would you wear satin and silk?
I think that the girl is gone mad.

How shall I go to the church
Billy my own sweet lad?
You shall ride in my wheelbarrow
If you think it is good.
Shall I have nothing that's finer
Billy my own sweet lad?
Would you have horses and coach?
I think that the girl is gone mad.

We compiled part of a Handbook of Etiquette for All Occasions . . . one of James's contributions was: For The Wedding: "A bride should not bounce to the alter (sic) but carry one glove in the hand."

RACHEL FERGUSON, *A Harp in Lowndes Square*

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So stately his form, and so lovely her face,
That never a hall such a galliard did grace;
While her mother did fret, and her father did fume,
And the bridegroom stood dangling his bonnet and plume;
And the bride-maidens whispered "'Twere better by far
To have match'd our fair cousin with young Lochinvar."

WALTER SCOTT, *Marmion*

Ill-Groomed

Boy and Davey came up the aisle, and Boy shook hands with us. He had evidently got rid of his cold, at last, and was looking quite well; his hair, I noticed, had received the attention of a damp comb to induce little waves and a curl or two, and his figure, not bad at all, especially from behind, was set off by his wedding clothes. He wore a white carnation, and Davey a red one. But though he was in the costume of a bridegroom, he had not the spirit to add to this new part to his repertory with any conviction and his whole attitude was more appropriate to a chief mourner. Davey even had to show him where to stand, by the altar steps. I never saw a man look so hopeless . . .

And then, up the aisle, one large white hand on her father's arm, dispelling the gloomy embarrassment which hung like a fog in the chapel, came Polly, calm, confident, and noble, radiating happiness. Somehow, she had got herself a wedding-dress (did I recognise a ball dress of last season? No matter) and was in a cloud of white tulle and lilies-of-the-valley and joy.

NANCY MITFORD, *Love in a Cold Climate*

The Bride

Her feet beneath her petticoat
Like little mice, stole in and out,
As if they feared the light:
But O she dances such a way!
No sun upon an Easter-day
Is half so fine a sight.

JOHN SUCKLING, *A Ballad Upon a Wedding*

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Chez Zigli

BY STUART CLOETE

THE Café de Commerce in the town of Lavin in the department of Pas-de-Calais was the exact counterpart of all the other Cafés and Hotels de Commerce in France, give or take a little in terms of local cooking, vins du pays, accent, and so on.

It was clean without being spotless. The cooking was good, the helpings plentiful, the servants friendly but far from obsequious. It had a billiard-table of the usual small continental pocketless kind, and a long zinc bar. Behind the bar was Madame Zigli, the patronne, a woman of uncertain age and passé beauty. Beneath the ravaged face in which great dark eyes seemed to have been burnt with a poker, there were the remains of beauty, as if beauty was a cloth on which the dirt of life had been spilt. Here was the pre-ravaged shadow.

I should have liked to know the story, sordid as no doubt it was. Being a writer, all stories interest me. I am intrigued, curious of all mystery and able sometimes to transmute with my pen the most improbable material into a few days' lodging, a good meal or two, with a bottle of wine that is not anonymous and proudly bears on its label its name and the year of its birth. That is to say, though I am driven like all artists by a creative urge, I also write to eat.

Madame Zigli's name was Emeline, a name that I found charming, the three syllables rolling off the tongue deliciously, each a little painful cry of joy. Not that I had ever called her Emeline, but often in my mind I said her name soundlessly, crying out the syllables in the silence of the night.

She was tall, broomstick slim, almost emaciated, with piled masses of coarse black horsetail hair that must when down have reached to her thighs.

I was convinced that this woman was by nature pliant, supple as a wand, and that her stiffness was of psychological origin, that she held herself taut and stiff for fear that if she relaxed at

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all, if she let go anywhere, she would collapse. Like all men of my trade, I am an amateur psychologist.

Antoine Zigli was a dried-up, sunburnt man of fifty, an ex-non-commissioned officer of the Zouaves. He called himself a sergeant-major, but I doubted his word—a sergeant at most I think. Spiritually he wore uniform all the time. He marched about his establishment in the invisible baggy trousers and the loose unbuttoned vest of his famous regiment. " Je suis Zouave," he would cry, banging his chest like a small desiccated gorilla, as if he was saying I am one of the elect, the blest, the chosen, which indeed he believed he was. In Algeria, in Morocco where the sun had sucked the water out of his blood on the phenomenal desert marches of his corps, he asserted that the Zouaves had only one equal: The Legion. He was a fierce man, dangerous as a chained dog. There are many like him. The chain that holds them is the law and fear of prison.

He was ambitious, greedy for money and fame. He had the absurd notion that if he had some attraction at the Commerce he would put it on the map, that people would come from all over France to see it, tourists, as if it was a three-star restaurant in the *Guide Michelin.*

He was also prepared to settle for less. Antoine Zigli was the kind of man who would dicker with God. Everything with him was a matter for discussion, for bargaining, the result perhaps of obscure, coffee-soaked transactions in the souks of North Africa. What he would really have liked, he confided to me one day, was

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a boîte, a Pigalle-ish joint in Paris, avec des femmes nues. "That, Monsieur Clouette—" that was the way he pronounced my name —" will always bring clients, mais toujours . . ."

That was what Antoine Zigli wanted. That was his dream. But he would have settled for anything. Even something quite small so that people would speak of going to Zigli's instead of the Café de Commerce.

That I knew so much about this far from admirable establishment—after all, I too had my dreams—was due to the fact that I almost lived there, writing, hour after hour, day after day, at a marble-topped table in a corner, the novel that would one day make me famous.

My table, as I called it, was well situated for light, being against the window. But unfortunately the rue Victor Hugo—and I often wondered how many streets in France were named after this great author—was a thoroughfare on which there were many office buildings entirely inhabited, it seemed to me, by nubile young ladies: secretaries, stenographers, receptionists, and so on. In consequence, when I looked out I tried always to look upward at God's clear, clean, empty sky; at the voluptuous cloud formations rather than at the hundreds and hundreds of beautiful, slim, nylon-clad legs that passed my window in an endless and titillating stream.

First the young ladies came to work, their high heels pit-a-patting on the pavement like the small hoofs of deer. This was while I had my breakfast coffee. Then they went to lunch. Then they came back from lunch. And finally, at five o'clock, they hurried home as if pursued by wolves to their waiting fathers, husbands, and lovers, in a whirl of knees, short skirts, and undulating hair, enveloped in a cloud of laughing chatter.

How I longed for a word with one of them, a soft glance or a smile that was just for me. What a gift that would have been. For here I was, the love of which I had so much, wasted, unwanted.

I dreamed of a young wife, children, a little house with a small kitchen garden at the back where I could have chickens, rabbits in hutches, and pigeons. In the front there would be a weeping ash trained like an umbrella into a summerhouse where we would sit in the shade and watch life go by. These thoughts would drive me back to work, to the paper and the pen on which so much depended.

All young men have dreams—I was young then—kept in escrow in a bank of hope on which they can draw when in despair. But they are not the only drawers on this account. Time also writes its cheques, and as a man ages the balance of hope grows smaller, till at last he draws out the minuscule balance left to

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him and blows it, taking anything that comes his way in a last play for happiness on the green baize cloth of circumstance. No high numbers will come up now. Only the black and the red are left.

Emeline was no more than a symbol to me, a woman I could watch without embarrassment, because her position was fixed behind the bar, like a geranium in a pot. But one does not pick geraniums. It is the swaying daffodils, the wild white anemones, the bluebells in the wooded dells one gathers hot-handed in the spring.

But for women, even the nicest of them, a man must have money, enough at least to take them to a film or buy a modest meal. I read once somewhere that male birds establish the possession of a territory by their song, thus proving their avian affluence. To them the hens come seeking comfort and security. Men resemble birds in many ways—for they too seek colour and beauty, and can sing with joy. How I would sing, had I money in the bank! Not only in my bath but out of it. And, financially secure, I, like a bird, would have no difficulty in securing a lovely and a loving mate.

There was nothing unnatural in these thoughts. They came from a frustrated heart, from songs that stuck like fishbones in my throat. But to write, to succeed, one must live, and to live one must eat.

So one day, my pride beaten down by the whip of penury, I said to the patron, "Give me a meal a day free, patron, and I will dedicate this work to you. *To my friend, Sergeant-Major Antoine Zigli of the 1st Regiment of Zouaves.* That would be something," I said. "The tourists would come."

To him all tourists were like angels. In his mind he saw them coming with their cameras strung round their necks and their pockets full of little blue folders of travellers' cheques. For Zigli the rustle of notes corresponded to the sound of angels' wings.

I could see his mind working like one of those ants' nests enclosed in glass where one can watch their formic and hopeless industry.

He was saying to himself, "Suppose this type, this no-good, is right? Suppose he does become famous . . ."

I drove my point home. I banged the marble table-top till my cup jumped.

"This table," I cried, "my table. You can point to it. You can charge extra for drinks served at it."

As if it were a lock, a tumbler fell into place in his mind. It was worth taking a chance.

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" Not a full meal, Monsieur Clouette," he said. " Just soup. Soup once a day."

Well, soup, if one put enough bread in it, would support life.

" With bread, Monsieur Zigli," I said. " No bread, no dedication."

" With bread," he said, and turned away feeling defrauded, tricked, betrayed.

That was how I came into daily contact with my friend Napoleon, the old waiter in the dining-room who stood with knees bent like those of a foundered cab horse under the long tablecloth of his apron.

The very first day when I ordered my soup I said, " Monsieur Napoleon, I am to have soup and bread on the house because the patron loves the arts and does not wish to see an artist die of malnutrition before his eyes. But there will be no tips, no pourboire. Instead I will treat you as a gentleman. I shall say ' Please,' and ' Thank you,' Monsieur Napoleon."

Tears came to his eyes. " I appreciate the gesture, Monsieur Clouette," he said, " and what after all is ten or even fifteen per cent on a plate of soup? Besides, it is my right, and it shows your perspicacity as a man of letters to have seen through this absurd disguise. I am a veritable Buonaparte, a descendant of the Emperor."

I said, " Ça se voit tout de suite," though in truth there was nothing Napoleonic about him except his size—he was short—and his habit of standing with his right hand hidden in the folds of his black jacket.

I wrote at that white, dark-veined marble table for a year. I had three hundred and sixty-five plates of soup, twice as many or more rolls, and several thousand cups of coffee. I paid for the coffee. But in all this time my most ardent glances failed to touch the arid heart of the dark-haired Emeline.

Antoine was visibly thinking that I had drunk enough free soup. Still, the word of a Zouave was his bond, so all he did was to instruct Napoleon to oversalt my frugal meal, which being my friend he only pretended to do.

Then one day there was no Napoleon. The old man had died peacefully in his sleep, his right hand hidden in the opening of his striped flannel nightgown. Among his papers, which Zigli searched, looking for a relative who would assume the expense of his obsequies, he found letters. Letters from Napoleon to the old waiter's great-grandfather, one of the Emperor's illegitimate sons. He found old medals and certificates of birth.

" My God," Zigli said. " My God, we had an attraction

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here all the time. A descendant of the Emperor. Vive l'Empereur!" he shouted. "So he is dead. But in death I will make him famous."

Emeline wept torrents of tears from her burnt-in eyes. Her hair fell down. It reached almost to her knees.

"My father," she cried, "my poor papa. And we treated him so badly."

"Why did you not tell me?" Zigli said.

"He wanted it kept secret, Antoine. He did not want the world to know that one of his blood could sink so low."

"He told me," I said. "He told everyone."

"Certainly," Emeline sobbed, "but you did not believe him. No one believed him."

"It was you who got him here from Paris," Zigli said. "I always wondered why. I thought perhaps that once in his younger days you had been his mistress."

"He was my father," Emeline cried. "Papa. Poor Papa. He did not wish you or anyone to know the truth. Not that he was descended from the Emperor, nor that such a one as he should be forced to work as a waiter for his own son-in-law. If he had little else he had his pride."

"Then you, his daughter, are also a descendant," Zigli said. "Josephine, that is your new name. We have an attraction now at Zigli's—a daughter of the Emperor.

"What a funeral your father will have! What funeral pomps. There will be articles in the paper. Then Monsieur the Mayor will make an interminable speech. Eulogies on every side. We will ask the Deputy to come. The Archbishop will preside. Napoleon will be drawn to his resting-place by six black horses with plumes on their heads, their bodies draped with black cloths garnished with silver stars. His splendid casket will be hidden by flowers, mountains of flowers. He will be accompanied by a squadron of cuirassiers, by the National Guard, by the town band. This son of the Emperor will have flags. There will be flags at half mast. Flags everywhere."

Breathless, he turned to me. "And no more soup, Monsieur Clouette. To hell with the dedication. We now have fame enough."

He took his wife in his arms, murmuring, "Josephine, my Josephine," into the long black horsetail of her hair that hung almost to her knees.

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I don't care a twopenny damn what becomes of the ashes of Napoleon Buonaparte.

DUKE OF WELLINGTON

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The right man for the right job

By J. C. THOMPSON

GUY LUCAS had had a secretary of his own for only a month, and he still felt a secret pride every morning when she came into his unitised-panel office and asked, "What is the schedule for today, Mr. Lucas?"

It is true that Miss Halvorson was in her middle forties, totally humourless, and almost totally chinless; she had been dredged so to speak, from the bottom of the secretarial pool. But, Guy told himself, Scale 8 was the first scale at Greater United Foods where a man got a secretary of his own, and you couldn't exactly specify . . .

This morning, however, Miss Halvorson didn't ask her usual question. Instead, she handed Guy a sealed envelope and said, "Mr. Millikin's secretary asked me to give you this. You're to ring Mr. Millikin as soon as you can to discuss it with him."

Guy set his cardboard coffee-container down on the desk blotter.

"*Personal and Confidential.* What's it all about, Miss Halvorson?"

"I have no idea, Mr. Lucas. Mr. Millikin's secretary asked—"

"O.K., O.K. Thanks. I have some letters and reports, but they had better wait until I take care of this. I'll holler when I'm ready."

"Yes, Mr. Lucas."

When she had gone, Guy ripped open the envelope. Mr. Millikin, Greater United's Vice-President in Charge of Personnel, didn't send many *Personal and Confidential* notes, Guy thought.

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And he particularly didn't send them to junior executives in the Market Research Department.

Guy unfolded the single sheet of paper.

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

FROM: S. V. Millikin, Vice-President, Personnel

TO: Guy Lucas, Assistant Statistician, Market Research Department, National Sales Division, General Office.

An opportunity has arisen within the company which may interest you. Will you please telephone me soon so that we can set a time to discuss it.

This will probably involve your taking a series of aptitude tests; please arrange your schedule so that the next three or four days are as clear as possible. SVM

Guy set the memo down on his desk, sipped his lukewarm coffee, and pondered. " . . . opportunity . . . "? Hell's bells, I've just got a transfer from the adding-machine bullpen to Scale 8. I hope they're not going to send me back there. Guy put the coffee-container carefully into his wastepaper-basket so as not to splash out the dregs, picked up his internal phone, and dialled O.

" Mr. Millikin, please."

The appointment was for after lunch, so Guy ate alone. He didn't want to have even one drink before the meeting, and he didn't want to explain his abstinence to the fellows he usually ate with.

At two minutes to two, Guy got out of the lift at the seventeenth-floor " mahogany row," and the receptionist announced him.

Mr. Millikin had a folder on his desk, Guy's own personal file. He looked up and smiled at Guy, but did not rise or offer to shake hands.

" Afternoon, Lucas. Sit down. I appreciate your getting in touch with me so promptly. You're probably wondering what this is all about."

" Yes, sir, I am."

" Well, Lucas, I can't tell it *all* to you, but I'll try to hit the high spots. First, though, let's take a look at—" Millikin looked down at the folder—" where you've been, and where you think you're going, right? "

" Yes, sir, fine."

" Let's see. You're twenty-nine. Good school. Business Administration course. Pretty fair grades. Married." Millikin looked up sharply. " Happily married, Lucas? "

" Yes, sir, I guess I am."

" No squabbles, no arguments? "

" Well . . . "

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"Never mind, it's not really important. Children?"

"Two lovely little girls, sir. Six and four."

"Fine, fine. Now then, you went from college to a chemical firm, in accounting. And two years later you joined us." He looked up again. "How do you feel about that decision now?"

"Well, fine. I think I have a good future here, sir."

"Yes. I've been talking with Tinkham, your immediate superior. He tells me that since your elevation to Scale 8 you've been applying yourself well—long hours, taking work home with you, and so on. Right?"

"I'm trying to do the best I can, Mr. Millikin. Yes, I *have* been working hard, sir."

"Good. That was our impression."

Millikin was silent for perhaps five seconds. He regarded Guy intently. Then he flipped the file shut, leaned back in his chair, and smiled warmly.

"Lucas, I think you have a good future here, too. I've been going over your aptitude tests—the ones you took when you joined the company. They indicate a good, healthy amount of company orientation and other-directedness."

Guy looked puzzled.

"I'll put that in plainer language, Lucas. You're a good company man. Now, about these tests that you'll be taking. We have about thirty thousand employees, including plant personnel, all over the country. Here in the General Office there are over two thousand men, ranging from the Chairman of the Board down to the newest trainee. *My* job is to try to balance these two thousand men—in other words, to find the right men for the right jobs."

Millikin paused to light a cigarette, and Guy hastened to light one for himself.

Millikin continued. "And that's where these psychological tests come in, Lucas. They take out the guesswork. *My* judgment, just from talking with a man, certainly can't be a hundred per cent accurate. After all—" and Millikin smiled warmly again—"you can't tell a book from its cover, can you?"

"No, sir, I guess not."

"What's your personal opinion about these tests, Lucas? Got any resistance to them?"

"Well frankly, sir, I wonder just—what I mean is, I read *The Organisation Man*, and I . . ."

"Fine, fine, most interesting book. I'd say it might be a bit radical, personnel-wise, but *interesting*."

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" Yes, sir. I mean, I really think if the tests are valid, why I'm all for them. I don't mind them at all."

" Good. Because you have three days ahead that'll be full of tests."

Mr. Millikin got up, strolled to his window, and gazed out.

" Now then, you're probably wondering why, so close on the heels of your last advancement in duties and pay, we are considering you for something else. As I said, I can't be completely explicit at this point, but I *can* tell you that this will be a special assignment. We need one man—just one, for the job."

He turned, looked at Guy.

" I'll be administering the tests personally—" Guy's eyebrows went up; usually Mr. Millikin assigned this work to one of his many assistants—" due to the extreme importance of this particular project. Have you any questions? "

" Sir, I have, but I guess they'll wait. Until you can give me some more details, that is."

" Right. Well, then, Lucas, that's all for today. You've passed your first hurdle without even knowing it. This interview. I have my own personal criteria, and your answers, your attitude, your bearing—all these tell me, ' This might be the man.' Good day, Lucas. Please be in my conference room tomorrow morning at ten. We'll start the tests then."

On the train that night, Guy sat at his regular table in the refreshment car with three fellow Greater United men, Reg Paige, Steve Herdman, and Joe Collyer. They worked in the same building, although in different departments, they travelled together, and they lived in the same suburb.

Guy related what had happened during the day.

" And you have no idea what kind of job Millikin has in mind? "

" Nope."

" But those goddamn tests, Guy," Steve Herdman said. " In Public Relations we don't have to take them, and if we did I think I'd quit. I think they stink."

Guy looked at Steve, who was considered the radical of their little group.

" Steve, I don't like 'em either. But as old Millikin says, he has to find the right man for the right job. And the tests are pointers, so to speak."

" Guy's right, Steve," said Reg Paige. " They're scientifically valid."

" And what the hell," said Joe Collyer. " You can't fight red tape."

That night, it took Guy a long time to get to sleep. There was

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something very strange about this, he thought. He knew that he worked hard and well; he also knew that he was not one of those industrial boy wonders. Finally, he slept, to dream from time to time of blank test forms floating beyond his reach—just far enough so that he could not read the questions. And then they were gone . . .

The next day the tests began. They were much like the many others he had taken from the time he began working for Greater United Foods. Multiple-choice questions, running mostly to things such as:

If you could be successful in one of the following vocations, which would you choose? (a) museum curator, (b) farmer, (c) salesman, (d) dancing teacher.

Or, *Which of the following do you prefer? (a) symphony music, (b) jazz music, (c) news broadcasts.*

The tests filled the first and second days completely, draining Guy of energy and patience. Millikin was secretive, but pleasant, like a dentist in the waiting-room. And the tests went on.

When Guy got up on the third, the last day, he was very tired.

At the breakfast table, his wife said, "Honey, can you take a day off after this is over? Relax a little bit?"

"Don't know." Guy sipped his coffee, bit at a loose fragment of fingernail. "Frankly, this is driving me nuts. Not knowing, I mean. Maybe today—"

"Daddy," the six-year-old said, and Guy smiled at her. "I like kindergarten. Can I have one of my new friends over for dinner?"

"Sure, honey."

"Can I have *two* over?"

"You talk to your mummy about that."

"I want to go to kindergarten, too," the four-year-old said.

"Guy, I do hope you can take some time and rest. You haven't been playing with the girls, reading to them. And they miss it."

Guy closed his eyes and tightened his lips. "Gwen, I said that I'd try. And I will, dear."

As Guy left the house, he hugged each of his pretty daughters and kissed his wife. Then he kissed her again, hard. "I love you, Gwen. The strain'll be over soon. Wish me luck."

"Good luck, Guy."

And he went out to the car, and on to the station, and in to New York.

Guy finished the last test shortly before lunch.

"Get a quick sandwich and be back here in the conference

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room by one," Mr. Millikin said as he took the test papers. "Then we'll have a final personal interview."

When Guy returned, there were three other men waiting with Mr. Millikin.

"Mr. Lucas, this is Mr. Simpson, our Marketing V.P., and Mr. McQuinn, Executive Vice-President. And this is Dr. Burgundy, an industrial psychologist and consultant to Greater United."

Guy shook hands all round. He had never met any of the men before, although he had seen Mr. McQuinn and Mr. Simpson from time to time around the building. The other man, Dr. Burgundy, was a complete stranger. He was a large man, Guy noticed, with a curiously melancholy face.

"Now then, Lucas, we have a few questions to ask you," Mr. Millikin said. "Please relax, talk freely, we're all on the same pay-roll here." Everyone chuckled, except Dr. Burgundy.

"First," said Mr. McQuinn, "you consider yourself a pretty hard worker, generally, don't you, Lucas? Take work home . . ."

It was true. Almost every evening Guy took home an attaché case full of figures, trends, projections.

"I guess you could call me ambitious, Mr. McQuinn. I want to get ahead, to provide well for my family. And since I'm no genius, the best way to do it is to work hard, do my best. But I don't mind, I enjoy the work."

The four men nodded, exchanged glances. Dr. Burgundy made a note on a pocket pad and said, "Mr. Lucas, what are your ambitions here at Greater United? Do you want to be president of the company? Or what?"

Guy hesitated. "Well, I don't know. I know I'm not really brilliant, so I guess I'd never be president. Maybe Manager of Market Research. I just haven't thought about it very much."

Dr. Burgundy turned to the others. "What we thought. Drive factor almost exactly median."

Mr. Simpson spoke. "Would you consider yourself *loyal* to Greater United?"

"Why yes, sir. I'm loyal. I think it's a fine company."

Again the men exchanged glances and nodded.

Mr. Millikin said to Dr. Burgundy, "What do you think, Carl?"

"Just one more question." Dr. Burgundy regarded Guy with a peculiar intentness. "Is there any record in your family of mental illness?" He spoke very slowly, very precisely. "On either your mother's or your father's side, has anyone ever been in a mental institution, or been treated in hospital for depression or melancholia?"

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Guy felt a chill of uneasiness. "Mental illness?" No one moved or spoke.

"No, sir. All my folks were—just normal. Normal small-town folks, that's all."

"I see," said Dr. Burgundy, "I see."

"What do you think, Carl?" said Mr. Millikin.

Dr. Burgundy rose. "I think Mr. Lucas is our man. The tests indicate it, and as far as I'm concerned, our little talk here wraps it up."

The others stood.

Dr. Burgundy strode across the room. With astonishing swiftness, he drew a small blackjack from his coat pocket and in a continuous motion, before Guy could move, he swung it in an expert short sideways swipe to a point on Guy's head just above the left ear. Guy felt a hard crack of pain, the room swung crazily round him, and then blackness.

When Guy woke, he was lying on the conference-room couch, and his first awareness, after swimming out of the throbbing headache, was of quiet conversation. He opened his eyes, and saw Mr. Millikin, Mr. Simpson, Mr. McQuinn, and Dr. Burgundy standing by the window.

He tried to move, but he seemed to be paralysed. Only his head would respond, and it was with great effort that he could raise it an inch or so from the pillow on which it rested.

Guy tried to speak. It was a long, sighing moan.

The men turned from the window.

"He's awake," said Mr. Millikin.

"Can you hear us, Lucas?" asked Dr. Burgundy. "Can you speak?"

"Yes," Guy whispered.

"You've been given an injection," said Dr. Burgundy. "A simple curare derivative. You're paralysed partially, but if you try you can talk a little."

The men sat down. Mr. McQuinn looked at his watch. "Let's get on with it. I have a meeting with the West Coast Zone Manager at three thirty."

Mr. Millikin cleared his throat. "Lucas, as you may have gathered, you have been chosen for this rather—ah—special assignment."

He turned to Mr. McQuinn. "Jimmy, want to explain this from the point of view of the big picture?"

McQuinn was tamping tobacco into a pipe. "Certainly, Sam."

He struck a match. "The easiest way to say it, Lucas—"

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puff, puff—" is that from time to time—" puff, puff, puff—" it becomes necessary that—" he shook out the match deliberately—" a man *die* for Greater United Foods." He sucked again on his pipe. " *Die* for Greater United Foods," he repeated. " And you're the man, it turns out."

Guy felt his stomach slip and slide inside him. He strained to speak.

" What? "

" Oh, it's nothing personal, Lucas. And we don't *like* to do it, for heaven's sake."

" Of course not, Guy," interrupted Simpson, with the look of an earnest fifth-form teacher on his face. " But with management comes responsibility, you know. And we wouldn't be doing our jobs if we shirked ours."

" That's right," said McQuinn. " That's the whole point, you see. You have been chosen to die—as it happens, your death will appear to be a suicide—in order that others might live. Live more successfully and happily for Greater United, to be specific."

Guy gasped again. " Why? "

" Good question, Lucas," said Millikin briskly. " From time to time, as you must know, it's necessary for management to *motivate* our men in various ways. Sales contests, production quotas, you're familiar with all that. We try to keep you fellas pushing good and hard. But our studies *now* show that too many of you—especially you youngsters—are working *too* hard. Straining at the leash a little, carrying the worries of the world on your shoulders, so to speak."

" And it wouldn't do," said McQuinn, " for us to ask our men *not* to push, would it? That just wouldn't be good management. Carl? You got anything to add? "

Dr. Burgundy nodded. " There is also the future to consider, Lucas. The company men of your age and status grouping are eventually going to be running things around here from the managerial level on up. It is important that they reach those positions mentally and physically intact—without ulcers, without symptoms of chronic anxiety—in short, with healthy, well-balanced egos."

" Right," said Millikin. " So when it becomes necessary, we simply make it appear that *over*work has got in its licks. Let's see—the last two were simulated heart attacks, weren't they, Jim? " McQuinn nodded, puffing. " But once a year or so, a suicide really makes the men stop and think, slows them down. Actually *increases* productivity, strangely enough," he chuckled.

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"But why me?" Guy whispered.

"The tests, Lucas. They indicated that you'd never be a really top dog around here. You'd be just middle or upper-middle management. Lots of young sprouts like you around, you just happened to be the most average of all."

Simpson smiled his warm salesman's smile. "One thing, Guy: don't feel hurt about this. It's happened before and it'll happen again. We have to keep our men working hard—but not *too* hard. It's part of the free enterprise system, really part of the American Way."

Millikin said, "And your group insurance, pension fund—everything's in order. Your family'll be fine."

McQuinn cleared his throat, looked at his watch. "Gentlemen, my meeting . . ."

They stood, and Millikin said, "Thanks, Lucas. I can't say 'Good luck,' I guess, but chin up, fella, anyway."

And except for Dr. Burgundy they were gone, closing the door softly behind them.

Guy thrashed in panic. But his arms and legs only quivered.

"All traces of the injection will be gone in a few minutes," said Dr. Burgundy, "so we might as well get it over with."

He raised one of the large windows, and Guy felt the outside heat billow in through the cool air-conditioned room.

Then Dr. Burgundy lifted Guy easily, limp in his arms, walked to the window, and threw him out.

As Guy went out of the window, and down, he caught a glimpse of the deserted inside courtyard seventeen floors below, saw fractionally two tiny garbage cans against the building wall, closed his eyes, felt the breathtaking rush of air. And then he crashed on to the cement.

That evening, Herdman, Paige, and Collyer sat in silence in the refreshment car, portraits of stunned disbelief. From time to time, one would shake his head, sip from a glass of beer.

Finally, Paige spoke. "I don't understand it. I just don't."

"Guy was such a level-headed fellow," said Collyer.

Herdman looked at the other two. "But don't forget. He was pushing himself."

"That's right. He'd just made Scale 8 . . ."

"And was pressing damn hard for something even better."

Paige drained the beer from his glass and set it down hard. "The hell with it. All the money in the world isn't worth that."

"We should take it easier," said Collyer. "We should *all* take it a little easier."

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This month's reprint by readers' special request

C. S. FORESTER

Letters in Evidence

Exhibit 1

17 Hawthorn Road

DEAR MR. LACY,

My husband asks me to write to you and say that he would be glad if you would come round here on your way to the office tomorrow morning and bring with you all the papers regarding the sale of 72 Hillditch Road. His arm is much better, but, of course, he cannot drive his car yet and the doctor says that he had better not exert himself too much just at present.

Yours truly,
S. L. HART

Exhibit 2

17 Hawthorn Road

DEAR MR. LACY,

My husband would like you to come again tomorrow morning, as he has a good many private instructions to give you about the auction in the afternoon. He will be able to conduct the sale himself but, as I dare say he has told you, he finds it difficult to get out in the morning because of having to wait for the barber to come and shave him and so on.

Yours truly,
S. L. HART

Exhibit 3

17 Hawthorn Road

DEAR MR. LACY,

Just for a change this is not a business letter written on behalf of my husband, but it is one from me personally. Of course you can guess what it is about. I want to apologise for the scene yesterday in my house. It was very sweet of you to try to interfere, but you must never do that again. As you have

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worked for my husband for five or six years now, you ought to know how quick his temper is and how he often says things he doesn't really mean. Yesterday, of course, it was worse than usual because he still feels very helpless with his arm in a sling, and he has been shut indoors a good deal, and that preys on his temper.

But his arm will soon be well again now, and when he can get about and look after his business himself, he will be more cheerful. I was very frightened when you interfered, because I was afraid you might lose your job, and jobs aren't so easy to get nowadays. You will be careful with him, won't you? It doesn't matter about me because I am used to him by now, and you needn't ever worry on my account.

It is all right for me to worry about you, because I am older than you. I want you to promise me that you won't do anything to make him angry with you.

Yours very sincerely,
SYLVIA HART

Exhibit 4

17 Hawthorn Road

DEAR MR. LACY,

It was very good of you to write me that nice letter, but I am afraid you must never write to me again. My husband knew there was a letter for me this morning, and he wanted to know who it was from and what it was about, the same as he always does about my letters. I didn't let him see it, although it wasn't very easy to stop him.

Of course, there was nothing in it which you should not have written, but I didn't want him to see it and so, of course, there was an argument and a row, and he made Peter cry, and I was very unhappy. I do hope he was not in a very bad temper when he got to the office. I thought about you after he had gone, and I wondered if he was being rude to you. I expect he is often rude to you in the office, but you must not mind that, as it is just the way he has.

I hope when he comes home you will have managed to sell that house for him, as then he will be better tempered for the next few days. I remember that he told me once that you had a very good manner with " prospects," and you can guess that that means an awful lot when he says it about one of his own employees. One of these days I suppose I shall hear that you have set up as an auctioneer and estate agent on your own, and then the firm of Hart and Co. will have to look out for itself!

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But to go back to your letter. It hurts me very much to have to say what I have said about you never writing to me again, but you understand, don't you? I have had to burn your letter, because I don't dare leave it about. Please forgive me.

Yours,
SYLVIA HART

Exhibit 5

17 Hawthorn Road

DEAR FRANK,

Here I am sitting down to write to you the moment you have gone out of the house. I am so frightened in case George gets to hear that you have been here. You must never *never* come here again even if it is ever so safe. I can't think what he would do if he knew.

I was so glad when you came, too. I was upstairs putting Peter to bed for his morning sleep when I heard your knock, and I thought, Oh dear, here's another man come to sell things, and when I opened the door it was you! It was ever so nice of you to come, but I was so frightened. It is all very well for you to say that you always used to stop and have a cup of coffee while you are out on my husband's business, and so you can easily find time to come in and see me instead, but you shouldn't. You know you shouldn't.

There really isn't any need for you to worry about me, Frank. After all, I have been married to George for five years, and I ought to be able to look after myself by now. And I'm not a relation of yours, so there isn't any need for you to worry about me. And if I was a relation, you wouldn't be able to do anything because you work for George and you know that you would lose your job if you said anything to him about me. I have made my bed and now I must lie on it. That's what Auntie said to me when I told her the first time George was unkind to me.

I shall just have to go on lying on it. George is very clever as you know, and he knows he can always get at me through Peter. I hate him when he makes Peter cry, and now I shall always be anxious about you and worrying in case he is being unkind to you as well. I can guess quite easily how he treats his clerks. I am terrified in case you got back to the office late today and he was angry about it—although that would not be as bad as if he guessed where you had been. That is what I am really worrying about. I shall be very nervous until I know.

Yours,
SYLVIA

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Exhibit 6

17 Hawthorn Road

FRANK DEAR,

I don't think you'd better come again. I know I said that before, but this time I mean it and you know why. It's not because I'm frightened about George finding out that you've been here, although I'm frightened about that too, but it's for a different reason, which you ought to be able to guess without my telling you. We ought not to go on like this, because I am frightened of myself and something might happen. Please, Frank, let's end this thing now and never see each other again. We can just say good-bye and you can forget about me. I'm two years older than you are, Frank. George told me how old you were a long time ago, just after we got married. You will soon find someone the right age for you and you can marry her and forget about me. You didn't know that I had your photograph to remember you by, did you? But I have. It's in the spare bedroom—do you remember when George had a photo taken of the office with him outside with his staff? You're in that photo looking over George's shoulder, so I can always creep into the spare bedroom and see your photo whenever I want to, after we've said good-bye.

Frank, George is going to Eastbourne tomorrow about that house—The Hazels, isn't it—and he will be away all day. If you could come here in your lunchtime we could say good-bye to each other much more comfortably than any other time. Do come, Frank, because I want to show you what a nice lunch I can cook for you, ever so much nicer than Mrs. Haines can, I am sure. I don't expect she gives you very nice food. You ought to be better looked after than in those lodgings. Do come, and then we will have a lovely hour before we say good-bye.

Yours ever,

SYLVIA

Exhibit 7

17 Hawthorn Road

FRANK DARLING,

I love you so much. George came back from Eastbourne and it was all right. He brought back two African spears which he wants to hang up on the dining-room wall as ornaments. I don't mind as long as Peter can't reach them. He has just gone down to the Lion and so I am writing this quickly and I will slip out and post it before he comes back. Frank darling, I love you. I told you so such a lot of times today but I want to tell you again. Frank, we were mad today. We mustn't ever do anything like

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that again. And you didn't have your nice lunch after all. I should never have thought of looking at the time if I hadn't smelled the potatoes burning and found the saucepan all boiled dry. We mustn't ever do it again. I feel so ashamed, although I love you more than ever now, more than I did then. And we haven't settled anything at all because you had to run away so fast back to the office as soon as we saw what time it was. Darling, I wish I could kiss you good night, although I'm not going to kiss you again ever any more. I wish I didn't have to hurry writing this letter. Good-bye, Frank darling.

Always yours,

SYLVIA

P.S.—I have opened the envelope again because I am afraid that after today you won't love me or want to see me any more. It makes me feel awful. Tell me that you love me, Frank.

Exhibit 8

17 Hawthorn Road

FRANK DEAR,

I'm afraid this is going to be a terribly long and business-like letter, but I simply must say to you now all the things I've got to say. I never seem to manage it when we are together. We have other things to talk about then, haven't we, darling?

First of all, though, I must write down what I said to you yesterday, just to show I mean it. I won't leave George. It was sweet of you, darling, to ask me to, but you must see that we can't do it. George would give you the sack, of course, and we haven't any money or anything then. Isn't it dreadful that our love should be all tied up and hampered because of money! But there it is, darling. We'd starve, because you'd never get another job after the sort of reference George would give you. You know what he's like. I'd do charwoman's work for you, darling, but I can't bear the thought of you being out of a job and going short of things. It's bad enough now with you in those beastly lodgings. And I couldn't leave George anyway, because of Peter. It just shows what George is like, the way he is so careless about those spears he brought from Eastbourne and leaving them where Peter could get at them. And if I went away, George would keep Peter just because he knows that it would make me miserable. I simply couldn't leave Peter with George, darling. That would be dreadful. He's only two and a month, you see, dear, and George would never have him looked after the way I look after him. Life is dreadfully hard for lovers, isn't it, darling? We've just got to go on and on and hope for something to happen. So don't let's talk about it any more because it makes

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me miserable, and I want to be brave and happy and cheerful with my beautiful lover.

That makes me go on to the next thing I want to talk about. I do hope you destroy all these letters I send you, dear. Letters are very dangerous things, you know. It is a dreadful nuisance that Mrs. Haines hasn't got a telephone in her house because then I could ring you up and we wouldn't have to write anything. It would be lovely if I could ring you up in the evening and have a long talk with you, wouldn't it, sweetheart? I should have to wait until George had gone out to the Lion, though. Then it would be just before my bedtime, and I could tell you how much I wanted to have you with me and how I was going to dream about you all night. Darling, I love you so terribly. You will destroy these letters of mine, won't you? I've only had one letter from you and I had to burn that.

And I don't know when I'm going to see you again, sweetheart. It is all so difficult, and George is such a brute to me. I don't want to bore you with my troubles, darling, but he is so hard and cruel, and these last few days when he's seen me happy he's begun to wonder why I am, and it makes him worse, I'm sure. He made Peter cry at bedtime, and he had a lot more to drink than usual. I'm very glad my dear lover only drinks a glass of beer in the evening and nothing else.

I've got to leave off this long letter now, darling. It's a shame that I have to stop writing to my lover just to get George's tea ready for him. Lots and lots of love, my sweet darling Frank, and hundreds of kisses.

Ever your loving
SYLVIA

Exhibit 9

17 Hawthorn Road

Yesterday was so lovely, sweetheart, that I simply must sit down now and write to you about it. It all seemed too good to be true, what with George going to Eastbourne again—I hope he won't ever bring any more spears back—and Auntie saying she would have Peter for the day. It was a heavenly day that we had. When George came back in the evening I was still going through it in my mind but I had to stop myself when George said to me, What do you keep on grinning about? Then at night when I was in bed in the dark, I thought about it all over again and what a nice wild Irishman you are. I think blue eyes are much the nicest, and you have the nicest blue eyes there are, darling. And I like the way you part your hair, too. I think it was your parting that I noticed more than anything else the first

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time I saw you. That and the way your face crinkles up round your eyes when you smile.

I remember how terribly angry you looked that day the second time you came here when George's arm was bad and he was rude to me in front of you. It made your eyes flash fire just as they say in books. I've always heard that Irishmen have hot tempers, darling, but you are the first Irishman I've ever met. You won't ever be angry with me like that, will you, sweetheart? I think I should die if you were. You are so big and strong that sometimes it is hard for me to believe that you are really my lover. I have to close my eyes and think very hard about it, and then I can remember how I have held your head on my shoulder and kissed you and how young you looked then.

You're only twenty-five, darling, and I'm twenty-seven, and I felt like a mother to you then. I felt like that last night when I shut my eyes in the dark and tried to remember all that had happened during the day. It was ever so real, darling. It was horrible to feel George's chin all bristly on the pillow beside me instead of your nice smooth cheek. He hasn't any right to be in your place.

I should hate George even if he wasn't cruel to me, darling. But we can only go on hoping that something will happen soon. I love you such a lot, darling. My arms are hungry for you and I want you ever so badly and I can't have you. Darling, tell me you love me too. I can't help doubting it sometimes when I feel that all the world is against me like this. Think of me very hard tonight and I shall think of you.

Ever so much love, darling,

SYLVIA

Exhibit 10

17 Hawthorn Road

Darling, you say we can't go on like this and I know we can't, but what can we do? I can't leave George and I've told you so before. I can't leave him even for you, darling, as long as Peter is only a baby. And we should be starving in a fortnight if I left him. It is terrible for me as well as you, dear, to have to live with a man I hate so much. He was a beast to me again yesterday. I felt I could have stuck one of those spears into him easily. They were on the wall just beside me, but of course I didn't do it. I'm not Irish and not nearly as hot-tempered as some nice men I know—I mean one nice man, darling, because I only know one.

Sweetheart, come and kiss me soon so that I can forget my troubles. I don't know what we can do but while you kiss

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me it doesn't matter and perhaps something will happen which will make things come right. But if he hits me again, I don't know what I shall do, darling. I could stick one of his spears into him, really I could. I mustn't think about things like that, must I, dear? Of course you burn all my letters, dear, don't you? I keep on forgetting to ask you while you are with me—we do have such lots to say to each other then without being practical.

Lots of love, darling,

SYLVIA

Exhibit II

DEAREST,

Make sure you do everything I tell you. I was in such a hurry to get you out of the house that I couldn't make quite sure that you understood. You mustn't know anything about it, of course. You've never been here except those times when George asked you to come on business. I'm going to say I did it. By accident. I'm going to say I was trying to fix the spear upon the wall and it fell down and hit him. After I've gone out and posted this I shall come back and scream for help. You'll get this by tonight before anyone can do anything to you about it. And make sure you burn this letter the same as the others. I'm not a bit frightened now, darling. Not even though it is lying on the dining-room floor with its eyes open and the blood all round it. When everything has settled down again, we shall be able to get married quietly if you still want me, beloved. I must stop now, darling, because soon Peter will be waking up out of his morning sleep and I want to get all this finished and settled before then. Good-bye, darling. I don't blame you at all for it and I am glad you did it. George only had what he deserved. We shall be so happy together later on.

Ever your loving

SYLVIA

SOLUTIONS to Q THIS SIDE on page 59

1. *She came from Ophir, was going to sunny Palestine.*
2. *Norway.* 3. *Quod erat faciendum.*
4. *a. Dickens; b. Victor Hugo; c. Herman Wouk; d. Shakespeare; e. Trollope; f. G. K. Chesterton.*
5. *It meant torture.*
6. *A crossbow bolt.* 7. *Dionne.*
8. *a. Mystery ships; b. the Quartermaster's store.*
9. *Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch.*
10. *You can't tell the difference? Good heavens!*

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END OF WINTER

"In springs to come, will you remember?" she said softly

BY HARRY MARK PETRAKIS

THE first snow fell early in November. Almost at once the weather turned cold. Winds howled in the night and shook the house. The oil furnace ran from dark to dawn almost without stopping, but the rooms were still cold. Della and I got up several times during the night to make sure the boys were covered.

In the morning I was the first one up, and I shaved and woke the boys for school. While they dressed, Della made their lunches and cooked breakfast. We ate together and I left for work about the time the boys headed for the school bus. Della waved to us from the door, and the dog next door barked as she always did.

The boys were eight and six years old that winter. Della was pregnant again; we had the winter to go with the baby to be born in the spring.

The pattern of our lives ran much the same as it had for years. In the evening we ate supper and then watched a programme on TV—Disneyland or one of the better westerns. I enjoyed them, too. Then, while Della finished the dishes, I put Tom, the six-year-old, to bed. I washed him and tussled with him on the bed. I read him a story and took pleasure in his wonder at the world opening before his eyes. Ralph would come up and wash himself, and then the three of us would lie together in the darkness for a few moments recounting the events of the day.

Once a week Della and I went out. A baby-sitter came in and we went to a show or a play. Sometimes friends visited us. We drank Martinis or Manhattans and played charades and laughed about many things I could not remember the next day. After they had gone Della and I went to bed and made love.

I know that winter my job in advertising was no more beset by aggravations than it had been in other years. I had been promoted in the summer to brand manager, and while it increased my responsibilities it allowed me more freedom as well. I enjoyed my work most of the time and still looked forward to the

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evenings at home. If the routine of supper and baths and stories weighed sometimes on my back, much more often I was aware of the warmth and laughter.

So in a way I find it hard to understand why that winter, after almost twelve years of marriage, I should have been unfaithful to Della for the first time.

A girl who worked in our offices. Not a girl obviously suited to infidelities the way Norma was, tall and blonde with lithe long legs that gleamed like satin, or elfin-eyed little Dolores who worked in the art department and was always smudged cutely with paint and whispered promises to all the men at the office Christmas party.

Pat had shining black hair the colour of Della's. Both had large dark eyes and clear skin. They looked alike except that Pat was about twenty-four, the age Della was when we were married.

I remember that afternoon in November when I first suggested to Pat that we have dinner together. She had brought some copy into my office for my approval and stood waiting beside the desk. She had been with the firm about a year and I knew little about her except that she had been married young and then divorced. She had high small breasts and fine ankles. I was conscious of her as attractive, but I swear more than that drew me to her. There was a dream of candlelight and lost springs about her. A fleeting memory of youth as a time of promise. The shadow of some unfathomed sadness about her eyes.

Suddenly I felt the stirrings of desire, but not of the flesh alone. A wish to see behind the mask of her face, to share her laughter, and know her well enough to push back the dark errant curl of hair fallen across her forehead. I mentioned dinner to her then, my tone jesting, to provide a retreat if she seemed offended. She was silent for a long moment and I knew she understood the truth. In the way she watched me, coolly appraised me, I knew she had decided to accept.

She met me that night at a small café on the edge of the city. I waited at a table by the window as the snow fell softly on the bare trees in the park across the street. I thought of the years with Della and of the children at home preparing for bed. I thought of the unreality of the moment, sitting in a strange café, miles from my house, watching the snow fall and waiting for a strange girl.

When she came to the table she startled me. The snow glistened in her hair and her cheeks were bright, flushed with night and cold.

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" I'm late," she said, and her voice was low and husky and her red lips moved easily about her teeth as she spoke.

" I was watching the snow," I said.

I took her coat and saw the soft pale skin of the back of her neck. The waiter came and we ordered wine and then sat watching one another.

" When I walked up," she said, " you looked as if you had forgotten I was coming."

" I was watching the snow," I said, " and fell into some kind of trance."

" Were you hoping I would not come? "

" I'm glad you did."

" I wanted to," she said. " I am not much good at poses. I can't show outrage if I don't feel outrage."

" I guess you thought I was like the rest," I said. " Another married man with problems looking for a young shoulder to cry on."

She watched me silently for a moment.

" I have no problems," I said. " I love my wife and my children. I am not unhappy in my job."

" Then why are you here? " she asked softly.

That stopped me for a moment.

" I don't really know," I said. " I thought of a lot of things when you came into my office today. Maybe I fooled myself. Perhaps I'm here because you are very pretty and I want to touch you."

" That is why I came," she said quietly.

She must have read something in my eyes and she laughed softly.

" I told you I was no good at poses. Does that shock you? "

" A little," I said.

The waiter brought the wine and seemed to give us a look that implied censure. She raised her glass and the wine gleamed red.

" There are many wolves," she said, " behind every office door. They leer and pinch and pat. I don't think you belong among them. You are unaware of all the frantic machinations that go on in the office by men trying to get girls to go to bed."

" How can you be sure I'm not like all the others? " I said.

" I can't be sure," she said. " I think I am right. I think that's why I came. To be made love to by a man who has been faithful to his wife for twelve years is like lovemaking in a strange land."

So we ate a little and drank more wine and left the café. I sat with her in the front seat of her car with the heater going. We watched the snow falling around us in the deserted park.

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The scent of wine was about us, aroma of walnuts and richly laden midnight tables. I kissed her lips and tasted strange sweet fruit.

I touched her body, gently, almost shyly at first and then more rudely as the warmth became flame and yet unlike the passion I remembered in the first years with Della. Because even in desire I could not forget those years or the children that waited at home. So there was the sadness of this as we made love, a sweet and burning sadness, and all the while the snow kept falling out of the darkness.

In the next few months I saw Pat several times a week. I lied to Della of meetings with customers after hours. Of accounts in jeopardy and old college friends in for a few hours between trains. The trust built through our years together helped her believe. After the first night it was easier, and I did not think as often of the children.

Pat and I went dancing sometimes in little cafés outside the city and afterwards made love in the car. Other evenings we would spend in her small apartment with the glistening lamps and the model kitchen and the bed that came out of the living-room wall. We made ham sandwiches, thick with lettuce and tomatoes, and listened to her hi-fi as we ate them, and afterwards went to bed. Sometime after midnight I had to get up and dress to leave. She would be warm and sleepy within the sheets and her lips soft as I kissed her good-bye. Then I drove through the dark midnight streets to my own dark house. I undressed quietly in the bathroom and looked in on the boys and climbed gently into bed beside Della. She stirred restlessly and moved against me in the bed, warm as Pat had been warm, flesh that was mine where Pat's was borrowed. I would lie awake for a long time listening to the stillness of the house, hearing Della breathing softly in sleep beside me, finally falling asleep myself for a few moments and waking with a start, not sure in whose bed I really was.

There were nights when my life of lies and deception bred anger in me at Della and the children. I put the boys brusquely to bed, quick to slap or reprimand. Again there were nights I made love to Pat roughly as if to revenge myself for the injustice upon my family.

The weeks passed into months and the swell of Della's body curved like the arc of the moon. In awareness that her flesh would soon become sluggish and shapeless, she demanded love more fiercely than she had for years. Afterwards we lay together and she would be pleased and feel in some way we were drawing closer together.

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" I'm storing up love," she said. " For the baby. I'm taking love from you and holding it for the baby."

I would touch the warm flesh of her throat and stroke the slight swell of her body and feel a strange pain in my chest.

" I am scared about this baby," she said. " I wasn't with the others, but I am scared with this one."

" You will be all right," I said.

" I think I will," she said. " But I am older now. It must be harder when you are thirty-six, not as easy as when you are younger."

" It will be all right," I said.

" Tom was coughing today," she said. " I want to take him to Dr. Vaughan on Friday."

" All right," I said.

" Flora Seaman rang up today," she said. " They want us for dinner on Sunday. I rang Nora. She can come to stay with the children, if you want to go."

" We'll see," I said.

She rose from the bed and went into the bathroom. I watched her, not sure of just what I felt, but something bred of remorse and a shattering of my flesh.

There was a night in March I spent with Pat. She cooked supper for us in her apartment and then barefooted in slacks and a blouse came to lie at my side across the bed. The music from the record player in the corner drew together the small warm room.

" Almost two weeks since you last came," she said. " In a little while you will not come at all."

I touched her ear, the delicate lobe I had come to know so well.

" I have been busy," I said. " One of the boys has had a bad cold that keeps hanging on. He waits for me to come home in the evening." I paused for a moment under great tenderness and moved closer to her on the bed. " I miss you when I do not come," I said.

" I miss you too," she said.

We were silent for a while, listening to the music.

" I can see it ending," she said. " The little love that kept us warm this winter. There is something sad about love when it is over."

" Why do you say over? " I said. " Nothing is over yet. We will have the spring and the summer. Things will be the same."

She shook her head.

" For a little while you feel a part of you has been lost," she said. " You look into faces on the street to find someone, something that is gone."

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"Was your first love like that?"

"That was different," she said. "That hurt in a way terrible to remember. I was seventeen when I married him."

"Where is he now?"

"He is remarried," she said. "To a woman in Dallas who had three children." She laughed softly. "I would tell him he could not accept responsibility, so he showed me. But before that I wrote him long letters. Shameful letters in which I begged him to take me back. He never replied."

She uncoiled off the bed like a cat with warm and supple grace and came to sit on my knees. I put my arms around her waist and felt the warmth of her flesh through the thin cloth of her blouse.

"We should not stay in," she said. "It is not good for you and not good for me. You think of your children and your boy who is waiting for you to come, and I think of my first love and how far he is from me now. We should go somewhere far out of the city and dance and kiss each other in the shadows and make our love in the car."

"Tuesday night," I said. "Next Tuesday night we will do that. Tuesday night for sure."

I stood up and tucked my shirt in my trousers. She came once more into my arms, her dark eyes searching my face.

"In a little while it will be spring," she said. "And in the springs to come, will you remember this winter?"

"I will," I said. "I will."

When I got to the street I seemed to smell from far off the faint early scents of spring. The blind of her window was pulled slightly to the side, and she stood there with her body shaded against the light. I waved and could not be sure if she waved back or not.

When I got home I knew something was wrong. I came in the front door and hung my hat and coat in the hall cupboard. I saw light in the kitchen and felt a quick sense of dread.

Della sat dressed at the kitchen table. I stood for a moment in the doorway. She knew I was there, yet for a long moment she did not look up. I walked to the table and sat down and saw her cheeks pale and still moist and knew she had been crying.

"Wally," she said, and she spoke softly, in almost a whisper. "Wally, don't lie to me now. I promise not to cry any more or become angry. I want to talk to you. I can take almost anything, but don't lie to me now."

I sat there and did not answer.

"There was no meeting tonight," she said. "Lawrence

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called for you. And then I thought of all the other meetings late at night that you have attended the last few months. All the other things that suddenly fall into place. Then I knew it was a girl."

Her face was naked and her flesh tight across her cheeks.

"Yes," I said. "Tonight and all the other nights. Yes, there is a girl."

She must have expected to hear me say that, but still her face loosened as if the bone beneath the skin had suddenly broken. I was sorry I had not lied, that for a little while I had not indulged all the heated denials.

"Do you want a divorce?" she asked.

"Del," I said. "It was just a girl. I don't want a divorce. It didn't mean that much to me."

"It means that much to me," she said. "Maybe I want the divorce." Her voice rose just a little. "Do you think you are a rooster who can come swaggering back from another henhouse and find everything in order in his own roost?"

"Del," I said.

"Do you think because I'm pregnant now," she said, "and because I have the children, that I'm helpless? Do you think you can make me swallow your dirt because I'm helpless? Do you think that?"

"Del," I said. "I don't think that."

"Why?" she said. "I've been sitting here for almost three hours frantically trying to reason why, why? Is it that I'm not a good wife? I don't wash enough clothes or do enough dishes? I make too many demands? I nag too much? I don't keep myself neat? Why?"

"Del," I said, and struggled for the right words. "My God, Del, it was none of these things. Something happened to me. A bad and restless winter. It wasn't right, but it had nothing to do with you."

She laughed a hard little laugh that echoed strangely in the kitchen.

"Has she been the first?" she said. "Has this one been the first or have there been others?"

"I swear the first," I said.

She watched me then.

"What are we going to do?" she said. "What is it you want to do now?"

"I don't know," I said. "I mean there's nothing to be done. I will not see her again. I would have stopped soon anyway. I want you to believe that."

We sat silent for a long time.

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" Like a telegram saying someone close has died," she said. " A world suddenly coming apart. I was angry, but I'm not angry now. I am bewildered and confused. I don't know what this means to us." She put her hands across the full swell of her abdomen. " I don't know what this means for this one in my body or for the boys upstairs. I don't know just how to go on or how to turn back. I'm scared and I should still be angry, but I'm only scared and mixed up."

" Del," I said, and got up from my chair. I went to her, but she shook her head.

" Not now," she said. " Don't touch me yet. I want to believe you. I want you to tell me you still love me and we can go back to the way it was. Then I'm ashamed because it means I have no pride. I'm ashamed and scared and alone."

She stood up and walked out of the kitchen. After a moment I turned off the lights and followed her upstairs.

We undressed in the dark bedroom and did not speak. I went to the bathroom and when I came out she was lying still under the sheets.

I walked to the boys' room across the hall and checked them and came back. I sat on the edge of the bed and moved slowly beneath the sheets, careful not to touch her.

" I know what you want," she said softly. " I know what you want."

The house about us was quiet and the room shadowed and still.

" You want the love we had," she said. " You want us young as we used to be."

She moved helplessly beside me and I felt the length of her leg along my own flesh. I took her into my arms and held her tightly against the trembling that swept us both.

There was a sound of coughing from the boys' room. I got out of bed and went to them and Tom coughed again harshly in the darkness. I pulled his covers about his throat and felt the flesh of his cheek flushed and warm.

I went to the window and closed it a little. The night was cool and all the earth was still. Far off in the dark huge sky the timeless stars glistened.

I did not mind losing Pat, for she had never really belonged to me. We had both loved a dream of the past. But, in reaching back for the lost love of youth, I had left my Della alone. The years we had spent together and all the warm love we had shared I had turned to ashes in her heart.

In that moment a great sadness burnt my body.

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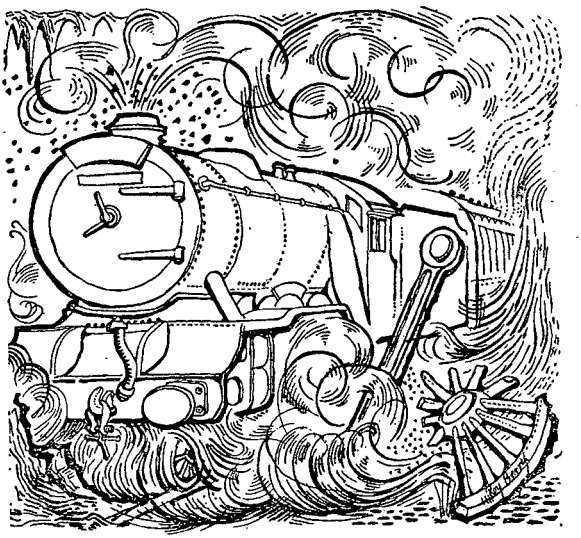

Steam Engines in Hell

By ROBERT MARCH

A MONTHLY season ticket to Edinburgh, please."

The booking-office clerk licked his lips slowly. "I beg your pardon?"

"I want a monthly season ticket to Edinburgh, please."

"From here to Edinburgh?"

"That's right, yes. From here."

The clerk looked at the old gentleman whose head and shoulders were framed in the glass panel and scratched his ear. "You'll be travelling daily?"

"Yes. At least, I think so."

The man must be crazy. "Daily from here to Edinburgh?"

"That's right."

Either that or his geography was a little adrift. "And back?"

"Yes."

"In one day?" The old man nodded. "You do know that it's three hundred and seventy odd miles from here to Edinburgh and it takes seven and a half hours to get there?"

"Oh—oh yes, I know."

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Jim Carter had been the clerk in that booking-office for close on eleven years, and the farthest he had ever booked a season ticket for was Stevenage, a comparatively short journey that lasted about thirty-five minutes. Not that he knew of any reason why he shouldn't issue a season ticket to Edinburgh. It was just that it seemed so damned silly.

"It'll cost you a small fortune, you know," he said hopefully, still convinced that the old boy was a little bit daft.

"Yes, I suppose so," replied the other. "But you see—I'm not paying for it."

The old man put one hand into the torn pocket of his old and shapeless gaberdine raincoat and fumbled around for a moment in the depths of the faded material. Mr. Carter waited patiently, wondering who it was that could afford to invest in a monthly season ticket to Edinburgh. It was on the tip of his tongue to ask the old boy why he had to make a round trip of nearly eight hundred miles every day for a month. He didn't want to offend him, however, so instead he crossed to the table in the corner and began to write out the ticket.

He had nearly finished when the old man coughed loudly. Not the sort of cough that comes of a tickle in the throat but rather a forced, commanding, come-here-I-want-you sort of cough. Jim hurriedly finished off the ticket and returned to the glass panel.

"Right then, that's done. Now, if you'll just—"

Stopping abruptly in the middle of what he was saying, he stared blankly at the old man. To be more precise, he stared blankly at the slot in the glass panel. Staring back at him, pointing with unerring accuracy straight between his eyes, was the cold leering muzzle of a small black revolver. Slowly his eyes moved upwards from it to look into the old man's face.

His gaze met the twinkling blue eyes of the old man, and rested there. They weren't hard eyes. They weren't cold, cynical, emotionless eyes. Rather they were warm and full of life and glittering like twin sapphires set deep in his seamed and wrinkled brown face. But the gun was hard. The gun was cold and dark and threatening. The eyes didn't look capable of killing a man, but the gun did, and perhaps the hand did too. It wouldn't take much pressure to pull the trigger far enough, and the fingers that held it were old and weak. Fingers that shook a little as he watched them; that twitched slightly as uncommanded nerves tugged at small muscles. Oh yes, that hand could kill. It could kill without even wanting to.

"Here! What the devil are you playing at?" he asked angrily. "Do you want to kill someone with that thing?"

The old man smiled politely.

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'My ticket, if you please."

Oh, that's wonderful, Jim thought. A stick-up for a season ticket to Edinburgh. That's bloody marvellous. There's enough cash under this desk to buy six season tickets to Edinburgh and spend each night at the Dorchester en route and he wants one solitary season.

The man was mad. Stark, raving mad. Easy, Jim, he thought, easy, lad. You don't want to scare him. Not with a trigger finger that shakes like it had the palsy. He might squeeze that trigger just a little too hard and—

"You going to pay for it?" he asked gently.

"My ticket, please."

"Oh yes, and what about me? How am I going to explain to British Railways that I just gave away a season ticket?"

"My ticket, please."

This was getting monotonous. That same answer. Why the hell couldn't someone else come into the booking-office for a ticket? Did no one ever travel anywhere by train on a Sunday evening? Two passengers so far: one a faith healer going to some Spiritualist gathering in Putney, and now this one. If he wasn't careful he'd be needing more than just a faith healer, he'd be needing the last rites.

"Sorry, chum. I can't give you this ticket without you giving me the money."

Heroics, he thought. BOOKING-OFFICE CLERK DIES IN DEFENCE OF BRITISH RAILWAYS' DEFICIT. He could see it splashed across the headlines of the morning papers. Good thing he wasn't married with children. That would really tug at the heartstrings of the British housewife.

"Look, chum. I can't possibly let you have this ticket without—"

Harold Winston Summers slowly squeezed the trigger. Slowly, because that was the way to get the most effective results. He knew. His eight-year-old grandson had given him a fully comprehensive course in the use of the little weapon.

From the cold leering muzzle of that small black revolver there issued forth, at quite considerable velocity, a thin jet of ice-cold water. It hit Carter straight between the eyes. Not only was this a remarkable piece of marksmanship from such an elderly exponent, but it also had a remarkable effect.

Carter passed out.

It may have been anticipation of imminent disaster. It may have been the delayed effect of being unexpectedly confronted by what gave all the appearance of being a revolver. It may

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have been merely the shock of being struck suddenly between the eyes by a stream of ice-cold water. Whatever the cause, Jim Carter sank effortlessly out of sight behind the counter. And there, for the moment, he remained.

The old man frowned. He looked first at the water-pistol, then at the empty space where Carter had been standing only a moment before, and then once again at the gun. He was bewildered. He couldn't understand what had happened. Surely he couldn't have killed someone with a water-pistol. Or could he? One thing was evident. He couldn't stay to find out. Hurriedly concealing the little weapon in the folds of his mackintosh, he picked up the ticket from where it lay on the wax-topped counter.

It was fortunate that his hands, deprived by age of their flesh, were thin enough to pass through the slot in the glass. It was fortunate also that Mr. Carter had not been holding the ticket in his hand when he fell. The thought of having to go into that room and remove the ticket from the fingers of what must surely be a corpse did not appeal in the least. He was indeed thankful that he had been spared such a distasteful task.

Putting the little piece of green cardboard carefully in his pocket, he sighed a long sigh of grateful relief. Then, after raising his hat politely to Mr. Carter, whose arm only was visible through the glass panel, he turned, and without further ado hobbled quickly off into the night.

Had his unfortunate victim paused to listen when he came slowly back to this world, he might have heard the gentle tap-tapping of a gnarled walking-stick on the damp paving-stones outside. But he didn't, and after a moment that too was swallowed up by the darkness.

And that might well have been the last that was seen or heard of Harold Winston Summers, but where then would have been his purpose? You see—Harold loved trains. Any sort of train: Diesel, steam, or electric. It didn't matter to him. They were all trains. Although he had to admit a certain preference for the more old-fashioned but infinitely more exciting steam engines. He was almost born whistling, as though he were a train leaving a tunnel. It was the constant complaint of his daughter-in-law that when he ate, the clackerty-clack, clackerty-clack of his false teeth was in perfect time with the Flying Scot.

In fact that was what started it.

That morning, the old man had taken nearly two hours to eat his breakfast. The toast had been responsible. It wasn't hard or difficult to eat. It wasn't that he had eaten a lot of it. It was the sound of it. The irresistible sound of his own jaws moving

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rhythmically up and down. Clackerty-clack, clackerty-clack, clackerty-clack. He made King's Cross two hours after putting the first bit of toast into his mouth and his daughter-in-law made her Waterloo a few seconds later.

"Huh! Finished at last, 'ave you? About time too. Been at it now for two bloomin' hours. I know what you've been up to!"

Harold blew the crumbs off the ends of his moustache and said nothing.

"Where was she going today then—Bristol or Southend?"

"Neither."

"No? By the amount of time it took you, I should think it was John o' Groats."

"There aren't any trains from here to John o' Groats."

"Well," she scoffed, "you should know!"

"It was Edinburgh," he murmured sullenly.

There was a pause.

"Edinburgh, was it?" she said after a moment. "I might 'ave guessed it. Our friend the Flying Scot again . . ."

She kept up an incessant barrage of sarcasm for twenty minutes. Half an hour later the old man left the house, and when he did so, resolved that he would not return to it until he had travelled at least once from King's Cross to Edinburgh on the Flying Scot.

By lunchtime he had decided to spend a week travelling on it, and by teatime a month. There was one problem. He had no money. He had left the house without a penny to his name, and even if he went back there he had none to fetch. Then he remembered the water-pistol. He had bought it as a present for his daughter-in-law's little boy. It worked too. More than one cat had been sent scurrying away from the house with its spirits severely dampened. With that in his pocket, he could bluff his way to Edinburgh or Carlisle or Aberdeen or anywhere that railway lines ran to.

He hadn't meant to use it. It was that clerk's fault. He wouldn't let him have the ticket.

Ah, but he'd got it now! He could feel it pressing into the palm of his hand. A season ticket for a whole month. Fifty-six trips of over seven hours each!

The old man tap-tapped his way home, jubilantly happy. He went straight into the kitchen and apologised to his daughter-in-law for taking so long over his breakfast that morning and kissed her on the cheek. She was so surprised that she dropped the frying-pan full of hot fat all over her spotlessly clean kitchen floor and burst into tears. Whereupon the old man apologised again for startling her and set to work to clear up the mess. The

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poor woman didn't recover from the shock until breakfast-time the next morning, when she received another one.

Harold had disappeared.

His bed had been slept in and the room was in its usual state of early morning bedlam, but the old man had gone. A most unusual state of affairs, for she had never once known him even to think of getting out of bed before eleven o'clock.

In fact he had risen at seven. A sufficiently early hour to ensure his safe departure before anyone else got up. A 73 bus from the bottom of the hill took him right into King's Cross in just under the hour. The fare had been " borrowed " from his daughter-in-law's purse, and so had sixpence extra for a bar of chocolate from the slot-machine on the platform.

From the moment he arrived at the station his world became like Heaven itself. His eyes were opened, he thought, and instead of seeing angels and seraphs and hearing heavenly music, he saw guards and porters and he heard the hiss and clatter of steam engines and the roar of Diesels. Surely Heaven could be no more wonderful than this?

In silent awe he stood beside a barrier and gazed in newfound rapture at the mechanical wonders that were before him. Just a little old man in an old brown raincoat, with a gnarled walking-stick in one hand and a season ticket to Edinburgh in the other, staring dreamily at a railway engine. Harmless, docile, lost in a world of steam and boilers and pistons.

" Pretty, ain't she? " a voice said in his right ear.

" Yes," he replied. " Yes . . . she's beautiful." He turned to look at the man who had spoken to him and saw that he was an engine-driver. " She's the most lovely engine I ever saw."

" Are you travelling on this one? " the driver asked.

" No—no, I don't think so. I'm going on the Flying Scot. This isn't the Flying Scot, is it? "

The man laughed. " No. Oh dear me, no. This is only going to Peterborough. Down the other end there, that's the Flying Scot. You'd better look snappy if you haven't got yourself a seat yet."

" Thank you, yes, I will."

He stood for a moment longer staring at the great engine and then hobbled quickly off down the platform in search of his beloved train. He came to the barrier to which the engine-driver had pointed and went up to the ticket-collector.

" Excuse me," he said. " Is this the right one for Edinburgh? "

" Yes. Leaving in three minutes' time."

" Thank you." The old man took a pace forward.

" Your ticket, sir? "

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He felt his arm grasped. "What? Oh yes, my ticket."

"Can't let you on without a ticket, you know," said the collector cheerfully.

"No—no, of course not."

The old man was flustered. He couldn't remember where he had put the ticket.

"I—I have it somewhere."

Then he made a mistake. In his confusion he began to take things from his pockets: a handkerchief, a newspaper cutting, the copper piece off the end of his walking-stick, the water-pistol.

He brought it out just as anyone else might bring the things out of their pockets if they had lost a ticket. He brought it out because he couldn't find his little piece of green cardboard, and as he did so a man stepped up from the other side of the barrier.

"Is that yours?"

"Yes—yes, it's mine."

"May I have a look?"

The newcomer, a big swarthy man in a dark charcoal-grey coat and a slightly lighter coloured trilby hat, took the water-pistol from the old man's hand.

"Excuse me, Inspector," the ticket-collector interrupted. "This train's due to leave in one minute's time. If this gentleman—"

So the man was a police inspector. What else could he be in those clothes? And the train was about to go.

"You would like to see his ticket, of course," said the inspector pointedly. "I believe that is what the gentleman was searching for so diligently when he showed us this." He turned the water-pistol over in his hand.

"Have you got your ticket now, sir?" asked the ticket-collector.

The old man hesitated for a moment before producing the little piece of green cardboard. He handed it silently to the collector, who studied it carefully through his thin wire spectacles.

"It's the one we're looking for, Inspector. Issued yesterday, with the right serial number."

As he spoke, the old man saw his train begin to move. Slowly, majestically, it pulled away from the platform. How beautiful she was, how solemnly beautiful. He felt the excitement surging up from deep inside him, and as he watched it he felt uplifted beyond the bounds of anything he had ever known before. For a few short moments he was no longer an old man but the spirit of a great train, slowly leaving the jungle of platforms and signals

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and points that formed the station, the prison of its power. Free he was. Free to gather speed and head for the open country and the miles of shining track that stretched in front like silver ribbons over the earth. Free as the wind.

But tears sprang into the old man's eyes. Warm salt tears welled up and took the sparkle from the pale blue eyes and tumbled over the rim and slid slowly down his wrinkled brown cheeks and fell on to the platform. His train had gone. Gone without him. And now he must go home to his daughter-in-law and apologise to her again and tell her where he had been. She would be worried. He didn't like her to be worried about him. He must go back to her and explain everything. Everything. She would understand. She always understood.

The inspector put one hand gently on his shoulder. "Will you come with me now, sir?"

The old man turned slowly from the barrier to face him. "I didn't mean to use it, you know. He wouldn't give me the ticket . . ."

"No, sir."

"Do you—do you think they'll hang me?"

Behind them a train whistled loudly. The inspector smiled and made some reply, but it was lost in the screeching and the hiss of steam, and the old man didn't hear. He wiped a tear from his chin with the back of a shaking hand. Then he smiled pathetically up at the inspector and allowed himself to be led gently by the arm away from the barrier.

"Inspector?" he said after they had walked a few paces. "I wonder, Inspector—in Heaven, do you think that they have steam engines as well as electric and Diesel?" He didn't wait for a reply, but went straight on. "I often wondered. But then, I shan't go there, shall I? Not if they're going to hang me. I suppose I shall go to the other place."

The old man stopped walking, and stood for a moment in silence, staring unseeingly before him as though thinking deeply about this new consideration. The inspector stood patiently at his side and said nothing. Then, to his surprise, the old man's face broke into a mischievous smile.

"Of course you know, down there," he said, "down there it's pretty well bound to be steam! With all that fire it couldn't be much else really, could it?"

And then he began to chuckle.

Quietly at first, as though to himself, and then louder. Louder and louder until faces began to turn and eyes to stare at this strange old man. Let them stare! Why should he care now? He, Harold Winston Summers, was going to drive a steam engine!

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There were steam engines in Hell.

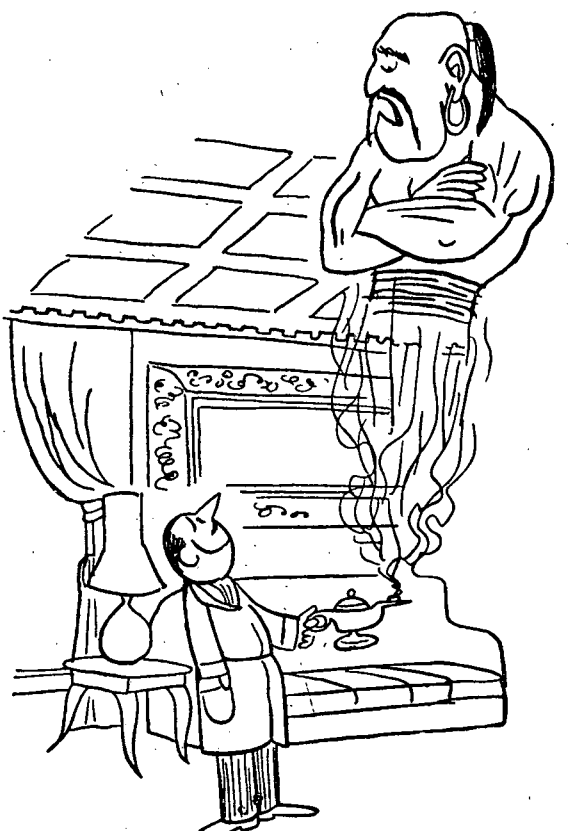
And he gathered in his tired lungs every ounce of air that he could, and turned to the staring faces.

"There are steam engines in Hell!" he cried. "*Steam Engines in Hell!*"

But the faces went on staring, and more joined them to stare, and the old man turned away from them and looked at the inspector.

"There are, you know," he said quietly.

And the inspector almost believed him. © Robert March 1963



"Always blondes! blondes! blondes!! What's wrong with a nice fat redhead once in a while?"

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SWEETS TO THE SWEET

Charlie loves a pretty girl
As sweet as sugar candy

Liquorice—

A stick of liquorice was good to suck . . .
I thrilled when lollipops were hawk'd about
THOMAS HOOD, *The Sweets of Youth*

—and all sorts!

On autumn and winter nights, his two lighted shopwindows—one for sweets, one for tins of groceries arranged in impressive pyramids—were oases of cheerfulness and light in the foggy streets. Boys and girls would gather round them for their games. We used to stand in front of the sweet window and gaze longingly at the bright bottles of sweets—Barley Sugar Fish, Berwick Cockles, Acid Drops, Lemon and Orange Slices, Jap Dessert, Pontefract Cakes, Jelly Babies, Raspberry Dewdrops, Genuine Silver Dragees, Nutty Nougat, Bubblegum, Devil's Dumbells, Sherbet Dabs, Black Jack Toffee, Wigga-Wagga Slabs, Cut Cavendish, Cinder Toffee and Barley Sugar Sticks.

There were all the liquorice "lines": Liquorice Braid, Liquorice Bootlaces, Liquorice Plug Tobacco, Liquorice Pipes, Liquorice Red Hot Pokers, and Liquorice Root. There were small, hard, blood-red, translucent, crescent-shaped cachous that we called Angels' Toenails, and semi-medicinal Eucalyptus Fudge, Horehound Candy, Coltsfoot Cubes, Chlorodyne Gums and Curiously Strong Peppermints. There were also little birdcages made of lacy pink and white sugar, and watches made of coloured candy whose hands always stood at ten-past two.

JAMES KIRKUP, *Sorrows, Passions and Alarms*

There was a boy, whose name was Jim;
His Friends were very good to him.
They gave him Tea, and Cakes, and Jam,
And slices of delicious Ham,
And Chocolate, with pink inside,
And little Tricycles to ride . . .
HILAIRE BELLOC, *Jim*

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Tuck-ish Delight

It was an official of the British Museum, who two years ago in the United States heard that Canford School might have some Assyrian carvings of 700 B.C. still thought to be missing from a group excavated at Nineveh, and brought back to this country in the last century by Sir Henry Layard, then a young member of the British Consular Service. The official came down to the school and, with the help of Mr. Hughes, the senior history master, he began taking a closer look at the walls of the tuck-shop, which was once used as a small museum. Together, behind the choc-bars and the lollipops they discovered Nineveh all over again . . .

The seven carvings, which are only about an inch and a half thick, have now been taken down from the walls of the tuck-shop without damage, and they will be up for auction with all traces of whitewash, toffee-apples, and sticky sweets gone for ever.

CHRISTOPHER RALLING

Cupboard Love

I know a little cupboard
With a teeny tiny key
And there's a jar of Lollipops
For me, me, me.

And when I'm good, my dear,
As good as good can be,
There's Banbury Cakes, and Lollipops
For me, me, me.

WALTER DE LA MARE, *The Cupboard*

Penn'orth of Sweets

Then his tormentors tussle and run to the Cockle Street sweet shop, their pennies sticky as honey, to buy from Miss Myfanwy Price, who is cocky and neat as a puff-bosomed robin and her small round buttocks tight as ticks, gobstoppers big as wens that rainbow as you suck, brandy-balls, winegums, hundreds and thousands, liquorice sweet as sick, nougat to tug and ribbon out like another red rubbery tongue . . .

DYLAN THOMAS, *Under Milk Wood*

The last taste of sweets is sweetest last . . .

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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PANIC

by John and Ward Hawkins

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" Strand," said a voice on the phone, " do you know who this is ? " Barry Strand, Security Officer of Gale's Store knew the extortionist's voice, but not the man or his name. He had planted a bomb in Strand's office, injuring and blinding Clancy, Barry's fiancée. Clancy, in hospital, had forced Barry to take back her engagement ring.

Night and day, in a suitcase chained to his wrist, Barry carried a vast sum of money put up by John Cramer, millionaire head of Gale's, to be paid over as and when the extortionist demanded—or else a second bomb would explode in Gale's.

Now Barry drove on, waiting for the extortionist's signal from the car ahead to stop and hand over the money . . .

BARRY STRAND drove on. The car ahead picked up speed and the distance between them widened. Very soon there would be a side road where Barry was to stop.

Barry did not look for it. His mind was on the car ahead—on the fact that the extortionist, so near now, would soon be out of sight and perhaps lost for ever. He jammed the accelerator to the floor. There was another advantage, he thought fiercely as the speedometer climbed past seventy; he had had three years' service in police cars; he knew his way on ice-sheathed roads.

The extortionist was watching him in his rear-view mirror, waiting for Barry's lights behind him to swing into the road and stop. The moment the side road was past, the extortionist knew what Barry intended. And he ran for it.

Barry saw what was happening; he said under his breath, " What a damn fool! " The man didn't have a chance. He could come abreast of him and force him to stop.

Barry didn't catch the car on the straight, but he halved the distance between them. The road began to swing in curves then, climbing. Barry lost sight of the car on the first curve, found it again, and lost it on the next. He was gaining fast. No more than three hundred yards separated them as they approached yet another curve. Barry fitted his speed to the maximum the icy road would allow.

" *On the next straight,*" he said. " *Plenty of time.*"

Then he saw the tail lights of the car ahead flash redly as the driver jammed on the brakes. He yelled, " No! " uselessly and much too late. The car ahead was in a wild skid. It went into the curve at seventy, completely out of control. It struck the guardrail broadside. An explosive cloud of snow and steel and timber flew into the air. The headlights sent a wild glare across the sky and then were gone. There was a gaping hole in the guardrail when Barry went by, fighting the wheel of his car, risking a great deal to bring it to a stop three hundred yards down the road.

Barry fastened the suitcase chain to the steering column in fumbling haste, then left the car and ran back. He was gasping

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for breath when he reached the break in the guardrail. The slope below was hardly less than a cliff. Barry saw where the snow had been scarred black by the car's first impact; there was another scar twenty yards beyond. Finally he could make out the dim shape of the wreck in a growth of scrub pine at the foot of the slope.

He went down to it, slipping, sliding, tearing the skin from his hands and knees. The top of the car was bashed down to near seat level, the glass shattered, the bumpers flattened against the body. He prised away the twisted metal and got a door open. He was sure the driver would be dead—and the driver was dead. But this was not the blow that drove him almost to his knees. He had expected to find the body of a man. This body, even though cruelly mangled, wore the stamp of housewife indelibly upon it.

At seven thirty in the morning the ash-grey light of winter came through the tall windows of Chief of Police Brandon's office at headquarters without warmth or kindliness. Each face it touched was made old. The men present were waiting for John Cramer.

Barry Strand waited, standing near one of the windows, staring at the blank brick wall across the way. His colour was bad, his cheeks were smudged with exhaustion and the stubble of beard. One trouser leg of his brown tweed suit was torn to show a skinned knee. The suitcase containing the money lay on a corner of Brandon's desk.

Brandon sat at his desk, huge, heavy-jowled. His lieutenant, Jeffers, darkly handsome, was sitting in a chair, his long legs spread before him. Summers, the district attorney, whitehaired and florid, was nibbling his lips as he stared at the floor. Police Captain Paul Gabrino stood against the wall, arms folded, looking at Barry, sadness in his round, pleasant face.

Five minutes went by in silence. Then John Cramer was ushered in. He looked at Barry steadily and coldly as he removed his coat. Then he looked at Brandon. "Well?" he said.

"I'm sore," Brandon said, suddenly and explosively. "I'm sore as hell, if you want to know. I fell in with what you wanted, Mr. Cramer. I played it your way—and what do I get? I get my throat cut!" He jerked his head in Barry's direction. "He has to be a hero. 'Store detective breaks extortion plot single-handed. City police caught napping.' Now my best chance is gone."

Cramer's eyes were on Barry. "Strand, I want your explanation."

"It never occurred to me the driver of the car might not be the extortionist," Barry said. "That was the mistake." There was no apology in his voice. "If you want to know why I tried to make the arrest, I'll be glad to tell you."

"I want to know," Cramer said.

"See the stretch of highway in your mind, then," Barry said. "It's long and empty. There are few crossroads and certainly no places to hide. My car was twenty or thirty miles an hour faster

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than the other. I could overtake and hold the road better. With my experience, I thought I ought to be the better driver. I felt I had to make the arrest."

"Arrest?" Jeffers said. "You killed the driver."

Barry's jaw tightened. "The woman killed herself trying to escape. No police officer is responsible for that."

"It was a botched job," Brandon said. "You can't talk your way out of it. If there was going to be an arrest, I was the man to organise it. You scared her silly. You're responsible for her death."

Cramer said, "Strand, the explanation I want is why you disobeyed a direct and explicit order. You were told *to deliver the money without argument or question.* You understood it, didn't you?"

"I did," Barry said.

"Then why didn't you obey orders?"

Barry looked into Cramer's eyes. "I think you know," he said. "But if you want me to explain my reasons, I will."

"I'll hear what you have to say."

"Nobody—neither you, nor I, nor the Chief—expected the chance of an easy arrest," Barry said. "The guy had been playing a very clever game. I thought he'd go on being clever—that he'd have the thing planned so that nobody could take him."

"And nobody did," Jeffers pointed out.

Barry ignored him. "The chance of an easy arrest hadn't been discussed. When I saw it, I thought a change of plan was indicated. I had to trust my own judgment. My judgment proved wrong. Understand me, I don't apologise for that. You didn't hire a robot when you hired me. You hired a man with a mind. And you expected him to use that mind on your behalf."

Cramer's dark eyes glittered. "I require a certain level of ability," he said. "One you don't seem to have."

"Just a minute, sir!"

The new voice belonged to Captain Gabrino. He came forward to the centre of the room, his face flushed and angry, his round eyes belligerent. "There ought to be a limit to this," he said. He looked at the others. "If I'd been in his position I would have done just what Barry did. I'll go further. I'll say Jeffers would have, and almost any other cop, the chief included. Look! There's this guy—he tried to kill you—he nearly killed the girl you want to marry—he's been giving you all kinds of hell. He's practically in your hands. He can't get away. Arrest him? Of course you arrest him! If you've got even one ounce of guts, you've got to!"

"Do you deny it was a mistake?" Jeffers asked.

"No!" Gabrino said. "I don't deny it; neither does Barry. And I've yet to meet a man who's never made an honest mistake in his life. You and me and everybody else, we can all make a mistake. And let's do something else," he said. "Let's admit to Barry now, so his boss can hear it, that what he did last night

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wasn't a total loss. It wasn't the extortionist, the man who planted the bomb in that car, and Barry didn't take the driver alive. But what he did was to hand us our first lead to the guy—a big and solid one that's going to wrap this up."

Cramer said, "Explain that, please."

Gabrino said, "Before this morning, it could have been the man in the moon for all we knew. What have we got now? We've got his woman, or a woman who was working with him, and we've got the car. She's dead, certainly. But when we identify her, we'll have him an hour later."

"Can you identify her?" Cramer asked.

Gabrino said, "The lab's working on it now—fingerprints, laundry marks, clothes, dentures. And there's the car—we know where she bought it. We know she used a phoney name and address, so the registration's no help, but somebody will know that car and who owned it. And there's more than half a chance that the extortionist's fingerprints are on it. All we need's a little time."

Cramer looked at Chief Brandon.

"Is all this true?"

"Yes," Brandon said grudgingly. Then he pointed a rigid finger at Barry. "But I want him out of it! He's a bungler. This is a police case now. There's going to be no advice from the outside, no interference."

"One moment." Barry stepped forward, lean and angry. "I've a personal interest in this. Miss Evans was the victim of a bomb intended for me. You're not going to cut me out. I'm the only man who has heard the extortionist's voice. I'm the only one who can identify him instantly. You're not going to deny yourself that kind of help."

"No," Summers said, "we certainly are not."

"It is his duty to give me that kind of help," Brandon said angrily. "I don't have to have him underfoot."

Summers lifted a hand. "This is no time for enforced cooperation," he said mildly. "There is no need for Strand to carry the suitcase until something further is heard from the extortionist. But he can help us in other ways, and we want him to do so willingly." He smiled at Cramer, then at Brandon. "You might as well retreat, gentlemen. You can't win."

Later, in his office, Gabrino reached for the telephone and called the lab. "Gabrino here," he said. "How are you getting on?" He listened a moment, face darkening. "I know, I know! You haven't had much time. But give me what you've got." He listened again. "All right," he said finally. "Keep at it, and keep in touch."

"Nothing," Barry said, stepping into the office. "Nothing at all."

"Not yet, anyway." Gabrino put down the phone. "Clothes were new, bargain-basement stuff. No laundry marks. Full dentures, upper and lower. No fingerprints on record here, no photograph."

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"Even if we'd taken the woman alive," Barry said, "we wouldn't have had anything."

"We'd have had her!"

"A round zero, Paul." Barry turned to the window, then turned back. "Listen to me for a minute. Suppose she'd refused to say a single word. Then suppose the extortionist had telephoned us an hour after we'd taken her into custody and said, 'Let her go at once, or within the day a bomb will explode in Gale's.' What would we have done?"

"We'd have let her go," Gabrino said, "but we'd have known who she was."

Barry put his back against the windowsill. "But do you suppose we should, Paul? Go to some small town a couple of thousand miles from here. Find a middle-aged, nobody sort of a woman. Bring her here in your car at night, keep her in your house out of sight during the day. No one knows she's there. At night, send her out to buy cheap clothes and a secondhand car for cash. Who is she, Paul?"

Gabrino's face was losing colour.

"She's nobody," Barry said. "Fingerprints? How many middle-aged women in this country have never been fingerprinted? Millions. Our one chance—our only chance—of identifying that woman was to make her talk. She can't talk now; she's dead. All the doors are closed."

Roy Clark sat rocking slowly in his favourite chair in front of the blank eye of a television set. The only light in the room was the last light of the day, falling weakly through slanted venetian blinds. He was wearing an old dressing-gown and frayed slippers. He was freshly shaved, his thinning hair was wetly combed across the bald spot on the top of his head.

The state of his mind interested him in a remote way. He did not feel anger or anguish; he did not feel anything at all very sharply. His mind was still and clear.

He was remembering a small town in south-eastern Oregon now. As an adult, he looked back on the years between fourteen and eighteen as the best years of his life: his only years of real tranquillity. His sister, Edith, had made them so. His father's small farm just outside the town, had been ideal for a young boy and a sister, older by two years, who had found all they required in the company of each other.

He hadn't known then why other young people, even adults, had considered them odd. He knew now, of course, that Edith's mind had not developed past that of a ten-year-old, and that his devotion to her, excluding all others, was strange for a boy. It had been enough to have her with him, going where he wanted to go, doing what he wanted her to do, without question.

Those years had been too few. During his second year at college, Edith had married a farm hand. He had left college that year without completing his course, but since Edith had married

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he had felt no desire to go back home. His life had then become a monotonous succession of unimportant jobs in one part of the country and another. He had finally become an accountant, and his last place of employment had been Gale's.

He had worked at Gale's for two years. He'd lost the position in a reorganisation of the accounting department, but the time spent there had not been without profit. He had become familiar with one of the city's largest and most prosperous stores. When he had decided upon extortion as a way to make a lot of money, Gale's had been the perfect target—wealthy, completely vulnerable, and as well known to him as the inside of his own home.

He rocked before the dead television set. Now he remembered the pain the news of Edith's marriage had brought him—remembered the pleasure he had felt twenty years later when he had heard her husband had died. Then he recalled the anger and frustration that had followed. Edith could have come to stay with him then, except that his wife, an ugly, unpleasant woman, had refused to have her. His wife's death had reopened the possibility that he and Edith could be together again; although his wife's long illness had left him deep in debt.

Roy Clark had solved that problem. It had not been hard for a man who had the ability to plan with careful attention to detail—and Edith had fitted into the plan perfectly. She hadn't lost her willingness to comply without question.

True, she had not fully understood what he had intended. He had been purposely vague. True, also, was the fact that she had been the weakest link. But her part had been a simple one. She had only to drive the car, to identify Strand's car, to flash the signal, and to wait. At the very most, it might have included pretending to be a mute for whatever time Clark might have needed to force her release from the police, if the police had arrested her.

But now Edith was dead. The thought gave Roy Clark a strange feeling of emptiness. He had had the same feeling when he had driven past the break in the guardrail, when he'd seen Strand's car parked on the shoulder of the road, and when he'd returned to see the police and the ambulance there. An onlooker had told him a woman had been killed, but he hadn't needed to hear it to know. The feeling of emptiness had told him.

He had told Edith to stop at once and give herself up if an attempt at arrest was made. She had disobeyed him. Why? Fear, of course. Strand had frightened her. She had never been a good driver. It had been no trick for Strand to overtake her and force her off the road.

Roy Clark didn't doubt that Strand had thought the extortionist was in the car.

Thinking about it quietly, Roy Clark decided the blame was not Strand's—at least not his alone. He had obeyed orders. The hand that had guided the tool, the mind that had directed it, the voice that had given the order, belonged to John Cramer—or, more exactly, to Gale's.

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He had always taken pride in being consistent. What Roy Clark planned would be done. A promise made by Roy Clark was a promise kept.

He had promised Gale's an explosion, should they fail to meet his terms. And they had failed. More, they had killed Edith, causing him great personal loss and great emotional distress. He had a completed bomb in his basement workshop. It would be no task at all to cause them suffering equal to his own. How easily things worked out for a thoughtful man!

Barry climbed the hospital steps at seven o'clock that evening. He carried a tape recorder and a briefcase containing spools of tape. He had had a few hours' sleep, but his lean face still bore the scars of fatigue that had gone bone-deep.

He went down the corridor to Clancy's room. The special nurse on duty, an awkward-looking woman of forty-odd, was in a chair by the window, reading.

Clancy Evans was lying quietly on the bed, staring sightlessly into the bandages that covered her eyes.

" Hullo, Kitten," Barry said.

She started slightly at the sound of his voice. She seemed about to speak, then changed her mind. She turned her face away from him—a protest more eloquent than words. The nurse had put her book aside. There was grave concern in her long face.

" Clancy," Barry said, " this is no way to act." He put a gentle hand on her, and she moved her shoulder as if to free it from his touch.

" I asked you to stay away."

" You asked Barry to stay away," he said, " and he did. This is the man you work for, talking to you now. Your boss, Miss Evans, and he needs help."

" No, Barry, go away! "

" Not until you hear me out." His voice was firm and impersonal, a boss's voice. " Dr. Whitney says it will be all right for you to do what I'm going to ask. I'm asking because you can probably do this job better than anyone else. And you're going to do it—if not for me, for Mr. Cramer. He's doing a great deal for you—the best doctors, the best private room in the hospital, special nurses round the clock. I don't see how you can refuse."

" You're trying to trick me," Clancy said.

" I've never been more serious in my life," Barry said firmly.

He asked the nurse to leave them alone, then put a chair beside Clancy's bed. " Brace yourself," he said. " It's a grim tale." He began with the first call from the extortionist, because that and all that followed had been kept from her. Watching her face, the movements of her lips, hearing her small sounds of sympathy and dismay, he was able to gauge her reactions.

" You can say I killed the woman," Barry said. " A lot of people are saying it."

" But it isn't so! " Clancy protested.

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" I hoped you'd feel that way," Barry said. " But there's no escaping the fact that I made a horrible mess of things. The police would have a far better chance of running down the extortionist if I'd simply delivered the money as ordered. Now they're stopped cold."

" But the woman—"

Barry told her why he thought they were not going to be able to identify the woman. " The police will go on trying, but it's a thin hope. I've got the only real lead that exists—the voice. And that's where I thought you could help me."

" But how? "

" By listening to tape-recorded voices."

Then he explained that Gabrino had taped and was still taping the voices of all suspects interrogated. There were a lot of them, and there would be a great many more.

" We're up against one big obstacle," Barry said. " The man wasn't using his own voice, or his normal voice, the only time we were able to get him on tape. His normal voice has a New England accent. Gabrino recorded the voices of three men—not suspects—who have the New England accent, so you'll know what we're hunting."

" What is it you want me to do? "

" Listen to the recordings," Barry said. " Hunt for the man. I've been through them and haven't spotted him. You've got more time; you'll be able to concentrate here, and perhaps your hearing is more sensitive just now. Look for small mistakes when you listen to the tapes, some indication the suspect is faking, that he's not using his normal voice. The broad, New England 'a' might slip out of a man who's pretending he's from, say, Colorado, you see? Our man is educated. The use of an unusual word might trip a man who's pretending he's not."

Clancy's mouth was tense with thought. " In the tape you have of his voice, he might have used an odd sort of word, or an unusual sentence structure. If the same things show up in one of the suspect interviews, it wouldn't matter what accent he used to hide his real voice."

" No, it wouldn't," Barry said.

And he breathed a deep, inward sigh of relief. She was interested, and her interest was growing. And so the plan he and Paul Gabrino had contrived might work. " If she is busy," Dr. Whitney had said in agreement, " she won't have time to be concerned about the possibility of blindness, or the limits of a woman's obligation to a future husband."

" You've got the idea, Clancy," Barry said. " The nurse will help you with the machine and the reels and the notes. I'd like you to start right away. Telephone to Paul or me with any idea you get."

" I'll do it," she said.

Barry watched her push herself higher on the pillow, getting ready, getting set to work. And he could not help but smile. But

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he did not bend to kiss her. Very businesslike, he said, " I'll keep in touch," and went away.

In his car, waiting for the engine to warm, he remembered he hadn't eaten. He cruised slowly away from the hospital, found a small restaurant, went in and sat at the counter near the cash register. The place had few patrons, the food was acceptable, and the cashier, a young and handsome woman, was most friendly. She talked to Barry while he was eating. And when the telephone at her elbow rang, she answered it, listened a moment, and said, " Why, certainly," and extended the phone to Barry.

He looked at it blankly. " For me? "

She smiled. " You look like the one, and you're sitting on the right stool."

Barry put his fork down slowly, a sensation of cold expanding inside him. His eyes on the cashier's face, he took the telephone and said carefully, " Yes? "

" Strand," a voice said, " do you know who this is? "

The voice was not quite as it usually was. It had an odd quality of calmness—somehow fragile, as if spun of thin and brittle glass.

" I know you," Strand said.

" I could have killed you tonight," the extortionist said. " I waited outside the hospital and followed you to the restaurant. Now I'm in a public call box not far away. I've decided not to kill you, though it could be said you deserve it."

" She killed herself."

" You were only a tool, carrying out orders," the extortionist said. " The responsibility lies with your superiors—with Gale's."

" You're wrong," Barry said.

" No, I'm not," the man said. He paused for a moment. " Your punishment will be substantial. But a far greater punishment is due to Gale's. The woman who was murdered was very important to me. It was largely because of her that I wanted the money. Since she's gone, I have no real need for it."

" The money is still available."

" I'm a man of my word," the extortionist went on calmly, as if he hadn't heard Barry. " I'm going to prove that. I promised you a bomb, and a bomb you shall have. It will explode one day soon in one of the busiest departments of Gale's."

Desperately Barry said, " You can't—"

" Oh, but I can," the man said. " Close the store, lock the doors if you like. I'm in no hurry. You'll have to open the store some day—next week, next month, next year. I'll wait. And then how will you stop me? Can you question every customer, Mr. Strand? Can you open every parcel? "

" If we have to," Barry said. " But we'll find you first! "

" I think not."

" Suppose we don't. What will you accomplish? Mass murder! What will it prove? The public hasn't hurt you. You say it was Gale's. Then why—? " And he stopped there. He was talking to an empty line . . .

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A meeting was held in the penthouse office of John Cramer. Chief Brandon, Lieutenant Jeffers, Summers, and Captain Gabrino were there. They heard what Barry had to say, and then the room became quiet. Barry stood waiting, his lean face dark with fatigue and discouragement, trying to show them no weakness. It was difficult. There was animosity close to malevolence in their eyes, a malevolence close to hate.

Ford Summers, the district attorney, cleared his throat. There was worry in his face; his eyes held a mixture of anger and grave concern. He glanced at Barry, then looked at the others.

" Gentlemen, I think we all feel the same," he said. " But let's do without recriminations, shall we? They would serve no useful purpose. Strand is suffering enough.

" The immediate question is how we are to prevent the explosion. Is there any hope of an arrest within the next few hours? "

Gabrino shook his head.

" All right," Summers said. " Our task, then, is to prevent an unknown man from exploding a bomb in the store. How do we do it? "

Silence... then Chief Brandon said, " Close the store."

The others looked at Cramer, waiting. The small man's face was bleak. After another moment of taut silence, he said quietly, " For how long? "

A red flush darkened Brandon's face. " I can't promise you it would be a day, or two days, or three." His voice was thick. " I will say it shouldn't take longer than that. I've got a hundred men trying to find this guy now. I'll put the whole force to work on it. We'll find him! "

Cramer said, " If our information from Strand is correct, the man expects us to close the store. He has promised he will wait until we open it again. He has said he would wait a year if he has to."

" Let him wait! " Brandon said. " All the time he's waiting, we're looking. We don't need to take him with the bomb in his hands. All we need is a lead to who he is and where he lives. We've made progress. We've eliminated dozens of suspects, narrowing down the field."

" Delude yourself, if you like," Cramer said, " but don't try to delude me. You haven't any idea who the man is. And unless he makes a move that will expose him, you'll never find out."

" That's not so! "

Cramer leaned forward across his desk. " I think it is. I think he's a man without a criminal record, with no motive but a desire for money. That's why you haven't found him before this."

" We can eliminate—"

" We can eliminate no one! " Cramer snapped. " Go to any residential district and knock on any door. The man who answers the door is not suspect, but he can be ' the bomber.' And if he is, he can laugh in your face.

" The man promised to wait—can't you accept that? A month

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from now, two months from now, we'd be faced with this same problem: shall we risk lives or shall we go out of business?"

"Is it one or the other?"

"It is," Cramer said. "The cost of closing this store for a single day during the Christmas buying season would stagger you. Gale's could very well be bankrupt—destroyed—before this man's patience runs out. Then what would he do? Start this same thing again with one of my competitors? They're big and profitable concerns."

Helplessly Brandon said, "What do you suggest?"

"I don't see that we have a choice," Cramer said. "What is my responsibility to my customers? That's what you're asking, isn't it? Have I a right to risk their lives? The answer is no! But what of my other responsibilities? I've got to take something like a courageous stand against a force that would destroy us. I think the thing to do is put the problem before the public. In a very real sense, this is their fight too. I can't risk their lives unknown to them. But I can let them join in the fight if they want to."

"How do you propose to do that?"

"Tomorrow's papers, all editions," Cramer said, "will carry a detailed account of all that has happened and all that may happen. It will be front-page news. More than that, the store will buy advertising space in which to give its own account. The possibility of death or injury to any person who enters the store will be clearly stated. Tear-sheets from the papers will be posted at all entrances and in all window displays. There will be no possibility of anyone entering the store unwarned."

"What about police?" Brandon said.

"Short of making the store an armed camp," Cramer said, "you can do whatever you think is necessary. You can't search every customer, you can't open every parcel they may have at the doors. But police at every door to look for suspicious persons would be a good idea, and so would a number of officers in plain clothes on every floor. But your main effort is to find the man before he decides to bring his bomb to the store."

"Are you admitting we have a chance?" Brandon asked.

"Admitting it?" Cramer said. "I'm praying desperately that you have."

After a sleepless night, Barry drove into town and put his car in Gale's carpark. At this early hour, with the street crowds yet to come, the store looked like an armed camp. There were uniformed police at every entrance. Inside the building, men and women in plain clothes had found places in the various departments. The assistants—present on a volunteer basis—spoke in whispers as they prepared for the business day.

The streets were filled swiftly and unbelievably. By nine o'clock, the traffic in the vicinity of the store was a serious police problem. The pavements were crowded beyond capacity. It was a huge crowd, a strange crowd, men and women of all ages,

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faces bright with excitement, eager with curiosity, grave with concern.

The doors opened at nine thirty. There was a moment in which the crowd held back, a moment in which to hope. But the moment was brief. When the few who wanted to show their bravery came in, they made cowards of those who didn't follow. And the pressure of the thousands trying to get closer, pushed against the faint of heart and undecided and forced them through the doors. Once inside, there was no turning back. The store began to fill quickly.

At first the police, Barry, and the store security officers tried their desperate best to look at every face and every parcel. They had to try—and for Barry, at least, every other task had to wait until the effort had been made—but it was beyond doing. Very soon there was scarcely room to move in any department on any floor.

Still, Barry went on trying for another hour. He moved through the crowd, seeking a man, an action, that might be worth a second look. He realised, finally, that almost every man and every action could be suspect, and that picking the right man would be a miracle. He climbed the stairs towards his offices, a man faced with the harshest of realities.

Roy Clark followed Barry as far as the fourth floor and turned off there to squeeze himself through the crowd. Clark's face wore an expression of satisfaction. He had brushed against Strand twice, rather firmly, in the crush on the ground floor. The first time he had been unnoticed. The second time, he had looked Strand in the face and had apologised. Strand had not given him even a second glance.

To Strand, he must have seemed just another middle-aged idiot, providing himself with a cheap thrill by proximity to a possible danger. A man with an unremarkable face, wearing a grey topcoat and grey hat, carrying several parcels, hurrying about aimlessly, eyes alight with a restrained sort of excitement—a man like a thousand others. There had been a thrill, but not a cheap one. The danger he faced was very real indeed, for he was the man responsible for all this, the man they were all looking for.

The feeling of importance and the sense of power were wonderful, almost intoxicating. He moved about the store for a long time before the heady enjoyment began to fade. Then, wanting to add to it, he began to search for a place where he could leave the bomb.

Some time before, he had purchased a new electric drill at Gale's. The drill had come in a corrugated-cardboard box, a shipping carton, sealed with paper tape. The box had been just the right size to contain the bomb. An outer wrapping of Gale's own brightly striped fancy paper had been concealment enough to allow him to bring the box into the store. In the Home Workshop department, he found a stack of perhaps a dozen boxes containing the same drill awaiting sale. He spent some time near

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the boxes, as if considering the purchase of one of the drills for a present. No one noticed him. And no one saw him exchange the box he'd brought with him for one of the others in the pile.

It was so ridiculously easy! Now even he would have trouble picking out the box he'd left—it was identical with the others. And the department was crowded. He estimated that within a radius of twenty-five feet—the lethal, or near-lethal area—there were at least twenty persons. The bomb would be very effective. He paid for the drill he had selected and left.

He went down the moving stairs to street level and left the store. Outside he chuckled quietly at a new thought. An assistant would probably sell the box before the day was out, and some customer was going to be very unhappy to discover that he had purchased a secondhand drill. But the customer could be grateful that a rehearsal, a test of police efficiency, had been necessary. Tomorrow, or whenever Roy Clark tired of the present commotion and decided to enlarge upon it, one of the boxes would contain a bomb . . .

Barry's security staff were gathered in the Conference Room. Gabrino sat behind them, big shoulders hunched, heavy chin low.

Barry faced them. "It's tough—I grant you that," he said, "but not hopeless. By putting together bits and pieces, I can give you a pretty detailed description, one that won't fit too many other men."

"Have you seen him?" Gabrino asked.

"Not to my knowledge," Barry said, "and that's part of my description. I know he's been near me, but I haven't noticed him. More, I've spoken to him in years past, but his face won't come back to me. Therefore, he's ordinary—average size, weight, and appearance. His voice tells me more. He's between forty and sixty. He's educated. And he's from New England. Educated means he's not a labourer. But he's not a successful man, or he wouldn't try extortion. I see him as a white-collar type, physically soft. And add this: a pair of tool-scarred hands. He has tools and knows how to use them because he built a fairly ingenious bomb.

"Hang on to this description. Add to it that the man's got a hobby, a home workshop. He had to buy tools. If he worked at Gale's, he bought his tools at Gale's. Expensive tools, on a Gale's salary, means paying by instalments. He'll be in the files of the Credit Department.

"We'll put the whole department to work," Barry said. "Gabrino will get us a green light from Cramer. The extortionist would buy at sales almost certainly—hunt for him in the records. Get Personnel on it. If he's still working, he's been an absentee most of the past week. If he has left or was sacked, then his record will show a New England birthplace. You've got the description. Bring the name of anyone even close to it, to my office as fast as you can."

"To you?" Gabrino said. "Are you going to check them by yourself?"

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"I know his voice—that's our last and best piece of identification," Barry said. "Anyone else will need half an hour of interrogation even to clear a suspect. Give me a car and a driver and the name of one suspect, and let me start. You make a list of the names as they come into my office, the best prospects first, and feed them to me over the police radio."

"All right," Gabrino said. "Let's go . . . I'll get Delaney."

Police-driver Delaney was twenty-five, large, redheaded, and freckled. His considerable ability at the wheel of a police car was nevertheless frightening. Barry braced himself as the car whipped round a lorry. "Left at the next corner," he said.

Delaney took the corner, tyres screeching. Then he came to a stop in front of a small white house.

Barry said, "I'll be as quick as I can."

He went up the path and rang the doorbell. It was a long time before there was any response, and then the door was opened cautiously, to the limit of a chain, by a small girl.

"Is this where Morris Brewer lives?"

"He's my father," the girl said.

"Is he at home? Or is your mother at home?"

The girl stared at Barry a moment. "They aren't here. They're working. I'm home from school today. I've got a sore throat."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Barry hesitated. "Tell me, has your father a workshop at home here?"

"He used to have—a long time ago."

"He hasn't any more?"

"When he was ill in hospital, he didn't have any money and he had to sell everything."

"Thank you." Barry turned away. "Good-bye, dear. Take care of your throat."

He went back to the car. "Cross that one off and try the next," he said to Delaney. He consulted his list.

"Gabrino called," Delaney said as they drove off. "Two more names—says he's got a radio in your office. You can check with him direct."

"When I've got something to check," Barry said.

The wife of a man named Collins answered the door at Barry's next stop. She was a frail and timid woman. Barry could not imagine her telling a convincing lie. She said her husband had been at work every day and home every night. She showed Barry her husband's workshop. There was no metal lathe. She let Barry talk to her husband, an insurance broker, on the telephone. The man's voice was wrong.

"Ulrich is next," Barry said to Delaney.

At first sight, the next address had the right feel and look about it. The house, in a neighbourhood of good houses, needed paint and a new roof. The woman who answered the door was young. She was good-looking in a brittle way. Her eyes were resentful, her voice was high and angry.

"What do you want?"

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" I'd like to see Mr. Ulrich," Barry said.

" He ain't here."

" Are you Mrs. Ulrich? "

" That's right. And who're you? "

" A detective," Barry said. He showed her his identification. " I'd like to come in and talk to you."

" Got a warrant? "

" Did you expect an officer with a warrant? "

" You cops give me a pain."

She turned abruptly, leaving the door open. Barry went inside, into a room cluttered with full ashtrays, newspapers, dirty glasses. The woman lighted a cigarette.

" Where is your husband? " Barry asked.

" I don't know—out somewhere."

" He isn't at work? "

" Not him. He ain't got a job."

" Can you guess where I might find him? "

" How? " the woman said angrily. " He was gone when I got up. I hope he's out getting some money. He better. I've had enough; I told him so last night. Him and his promises and big deals! ' Be patient, wait a couple of weeks '—that's all I ever hear."

" What kind of a big deal? "

" I'm going to be up to here in mink—that's all he'll tell me." She tossed her head. " But I'm not going to hold my breath while I'm waiting, believe me! "

A trembling started in Barry's legs. It was an effort to keep the excitement out of his voice. " Where was your husband born, Mrs. Ulrich? "

" New England. I don't know just where."

" He has a workshop, hasn't he? Here at home."

" How do you know that? "

" May I see it, Mrs. Ulrich? "

" Help yourself. It's out in the garage."

Barry went through the house to the garage. Ulrich's shop seemed complete. There were a small metal lathe, a drill press, and other good tools. Barry returned to the house and Mrs. Ulrich.

" And I'll tell you something," she said, " I ain't had a new dress in six months, but he can buy himself tools. Spends all his time out there when he's home. I can watch television till my eyes fall out, for all he cares."

" Have you a photograph of him, Mrs. Ulrich? "

She had a photograph taken two years before, when they were first married. Ulrich was a man of fifty-odd, average height, average weight. " What's he done, anyway? " Mrs. Ulrich asked.

Barry said, " I'll return the photo."

He went back to the car and told Delaney to drive round and park again. " This one is red hot," he said. He spoke to Gabrino on the police radio. Gabrino agreed Ulrich looked like the man they wanted.

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"We'll get right on to it," he said. "The whole department." He paused for a moment. "But you keep going, Barry. Find a couple more good suspects."

"Don't cut me out!" Barry protested. "Ulrich seems to fill the bill—a real witch for a wife, needs money, no job, and he's promised her mink in a week or two. He's got the workshop, he was born in New England, he fits the description. That's everything but a confession. Let me go with you."

"We don't need you to find Ulrich," Gabrino said. "We do need a place to go if Ulrich turns out to be a dog! You've been a cop long enough to know it can happen. Barry, if there was time for a mistake, I'd say yes. But there isn't time."

Barry and Delaney got moving again. They cleared two more names in half an hour, but neither man could shake off the feeling they were being left out of the main chase. "I bet you a month's pay that it's Ulrich," Delaney said.

"You won't bet with me," Barry told him. They had stopped before a neat brick house in a hilly district. The blinds were closed. Barry hesitated.

"Looks as if nobody's at home," Delaney said.

"Yes, it does." Barry consulted his list of names, searching for one at an address close by that would seem a better prospect.

"What's this one's name?"

"Roy Clark," Barry said.

"Doesn't mean a thing to me."

"Or me," Barry said. He stared at the blinds, the silent house. Then suddenly he said, "Oh hell! I'm doing a job and I might as well get on with it."

He got out of the car and went up the path. The man who answered the bell, after the third ring, was timid and frightened. He looked past Barry and saw the police car and began to shake. He looked about sixty, mild as milk, a little confused and certainly surprised at a visit from the police.

"What can I do for you, sir?" He fumbled in the pockets of a heavy apron he was wearing. "Won't you come in? I'm all alone here, but I—"

"This is just a routine check," Barry said. "If you'll answer a couple of questions. Your name is Roy Clark? You worked for Gale's?"

"Until two years ago. I've retired."

"You have a home workshop?"

"Yes. Would you like to see it?"

"Not at the moment," Barry said. "Where were you born, Mr. Clark?"

"In Oregon," Clark said. "My grandfather settled there in 'sixty-eight. My father—"

"Have you been in this city long?"

"Fifteen years."

"I see," Barry said. "Well, thank you, Mr. Clark. Sorry I disturbed you." Barry was frowning as he turned away.

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"What—what's happened?" Clark asked.

"Nothing to worry you," Barry said.

He went down the path and got into the car. Delaney looked at him. "Why the scowl?"

And Barry thought for a moment, then shook his head as if to clear it. "I'm slipping, I guess. The little guy's voice . . . but it's all wrong. As Western as a ten-gallon hat. Besides, he's a mouse." He scratched Roy Clark's name off the list and read the next one. "George Keller. Lives at 3530 North Williams. Let's go and talk to him."

Roy Clark had watched Barry get into the car. Then, after closing the door, he had hurried to a window to tip the blind a fraction and watch Barry read from what seemed to be a list and mark the list with a pencil. Now the police car drove away, and Roy Clark guided his shaking legs to a chair and collapsed there, trembling violently.

Frightened? He had been frightened almost out of his mind. The doorbell was connected so that it rang in his basement workshop. At the moment it had rung, he had been making a small adjustment in the trigger-spring of the second bomb. He had gone to the door, expecting to find a salesman—and then to find, of all people, Barry Strand!

What a moment that had been! His mind had gone blank; fear had leapt inside him; his legs had almost given out. How Strand had failed to see guilt written all over him, he would never know. He had felt caught in the act. As a matter of fact, he had had the bomb trigger-spring in his hand, and he had had to hide it away, fumbling like a child, in his apron pocket.

If Strand had said, "You're under arrest," he would have gone quietly. But it seemed that Strand had been making a routine check and had come upon the right doorstep by sheer chance.

Roy Clark began to smile a little foolishly. Pride and excitement and vast relief were mixed together in an odd way. And there was wonder too. He had not realised that danger could be so exhilarating, and that fear could stimulate the body like a powerful drug.

After a moment's consideration, he decided he was less afraid of being arrested than he was of being unable to complete his appointed task. The bomb was ready, save for a few minutes' work. He could wrap it up, dress himself, and reach the store today, while the afternoon crowd was still at its peak.

Barry and Delaney worked through a cluttered business district and stopped before a three-storey brick building.

Barry went in. To spend time and effort so far from the main chance was almost beyond enduring. Sam Ulrich was the main chance. He fitted so perfectly the picture of the man who had planted the bomb . . .

Barry's knock was answered by a woman. "Mrs. Keller?"

She was a gaunt, work-worn woman of middle years. She

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invited Barry in and answered his questions. Her answers sent Barry and Delaney a distance of three miles to check a workshop shared with a brother-in-law, then across town to talk to Keller, who couldn't be reached by telephone. Keller's accent was pure Brooklynese.

Back in the car, Delaney asked, "What now?"

"Call Gabrino!" Barry said angrily. "Get more names!"

But Gabrino called them. "Brace yourself, Barry," Gabrino said, and Barry's knuckles whitened as he gripped the microphone. "Scratch Ulrich—we've cleared him."

"What?" The word held real pain.

"He's an inventor," Gabrino said patiently, "he thinks. He built a gadget in that shop of his—a rig that fastens to the bumper of your car and squirts paint on any car that backs into you. He's been trying to get financial backing. He's a hopeless crank, Barry."

Barry felt as if he had come suddenly to the edge of a precipice. How could he go on?

Gabrino said, "I've got more names, Barry. But I'll be frank with you—they've been scraping the bottom of the barrel. Do you want to take them?"

"Give them to your people," Barry said. "I'll stand by to cover anything hot they may turn up. Ask them to look first for that New England accent."

"Will do," Gabrino said.

Barry sat a moment in glum despair, as near to giving up as a man could be. A place to go—a way to go beyond the precipice edge? That was the question.

"I can check with Clancy," he said finally. "To the hospital," he said to Delaney.

Barry went straight to Clancy's room. "Hullo, Kitten!"

"Oh, Barry!" she said. "Not yet!" She was bright and busy. Reels of tape were set about carefully on the bed, a clipboard holding pencil notes was beside her. The special nurse was standing beside the tape recorder, looking mussed and tired and driven.

"What d'you mean, not yet?" Barry asked.

"I haven't got anything for you yet," Clancy said. "It takes so long to memorise all the voices and all the words, and—but we've been working, haven't we, Nurse?"

"Good heavens, yes!" The nurse smiled wanly at Barry. "She isn't a patient; she's a tyrant. I've got whip marks all over me."

"You're good girls, both of you," Barry said. "I know you haven't had much time, but I could hope, couldn't I? I need all the help I can beg, borrow, or steal."

"Is it so bad?" Clancy asked.

"It's tough," Barry said.

"Barry, I'm sorry. You must be exhausted." Her hand hunted his, and he gave it to her and felt the sympathy in her fingers.

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" Barry," she said after a moment, " I haven't been much help. But maybe—well, something occurred to me while I was working on these tapes. Perhaps it's silly, perhaps not. I'll tell you anyway."

" I'm listening," Barry said.

" It would take quite a man to do what I'm thinking," Clancy said. " But it's not impossible. Barry, a thief puts on a mask when he robs a bank—before he robs it. This voice we've been looking for, couldn't it be a mask? "

" You mean not his normal voice? "

" One he invented to use when he talked to you."

" But I recognised it. I've heard it before."

" You couldn't remember who he was," Clancy said. " And this may be the reason. You'd heard the voice, but you hadn't heard it with the New England accent."

" But, Kitten," Barry protested, " that voice, that New England accent, is the only real lead I've got. Take that from me and I'm dead! "

" I'm probably wrong," Clancy said.

Barry's face was taut, his eyes were alive with thinking. " How many men did I clear this morning, most of them because they hadn't a New England accent? There was Keller, there was Brewer, there was Clark—*Clark*—that's the man! His voice rang a faint bell, but without that accent I passed it by. But that mouse, that mild little guy! " Barry sprang to his feet, upsetting the chair.

Frightened, Clancy said, " What's wrong? What—? "

Barry planted a quick kiss on her forehead. " A man named Barry Strand—that's what's wrong! " He was on his way to the door. " I'll keep in touch."

In the hall he began to run. He passed the staff sister's desk. He heard her call his name, but there wasn't time to stop. He ran down the stairs and out of the building. Delaney saw him coming and opened the car door.

" Step on it," Barry said, " and left on Forty-fifth."

Delaney stepped on it. They were going seventy in a matter of seconds. Not until then did Delaney ask his question. " What happened? "

" She gave me a lead." And then Barry told Delaney about Roy Clark.

Barry telephoned Gabrino and told him where they were going. He asked for a couple of cars to meet them there. Delaney got them to Clark's in a hurry. One car and two policemen were waiting. Barry sent one of the policemen with Delaney to cover the rear. He and the other policemen took the front. There was no answer to the ringing of the bell.

" He's hopped it," the policeman said.

" Maybe," Barry said. " Let's kick it in."

" You can't do that! "

" Can't I? "

Barry drove his shoulder against the door. The policeman added his shoulder to the next effort and the door burst open. They

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covered the rooms quickly. All were empty. Barry let Delaney in at the back door. "Nothing out there," Delaney said. Barry found the staircase to the basement and clattered down it. Here was the workshop. Padlocked cupboards lined the walls.

"This is the place," he said.

"Not so fast, Barry," Delaney said. "A lot of people have a workshop. It takes more than that to convict a man. We had more than that on Ulrich!"

He was right, Barry knew.

Clark could have gone away for any of a dozen innocent reasons. And without specific evidence, the mere fact of a workshop was not at all conclusive. And where was the specific evidence? The workshop was spotlessly clean. Barry cursed. He couldn't be baulked here—he wouldn't be baulked! He took a crowbar from a rack and attacked the locks on the cupboards. The three police watched with shocked, agonised faces.

"You're cutting your throat, Barry," Delaney said.

"Ear to ear," Barry agreed.

The cupboards contained small tools of all descriptions. There were boxes of carefully sorted nuts and bolts and screws. One cupboard was devoted to things electrical, parts of appliances, wire transformers, motors, and so on. Other cupboards contained plain junk carefully and neatly squirrelled away.

Barry ran over it all in desperate haste. He passed a yellow cardboard box twice without opening it, though the contents were obvious enough from the label.

"Shotgun shells!" he said suddenly and went back for the box. "What the devil's the matter with me? Shotgun shells I want." He set the box on a bench and tore it open. "Six shells missing!"

A policeman said, "He likes to shoot and—"

"A shotgun shell was the heart of the bomb that blew up my office," Barry said. He whirled. "Is there a gun in the house? I didn't see one."

"We'll look," Delaney said. There was no gun.

Barry left the two policemen at the house and took Delaney back to the car. On their way again, Barry called Gabrino and told him what they'd found. He gave Gabrino a careful, detailed description of Clark and asked for an all-out search.

"Stay out there, Barry, and wait for word from the chief. Don't let's go in at the deep end again."

"Deep end or no, I'm coming in!"

"We don't need you. I've got an army—"

"I talked to him!" Barry was almost yelling. "He knows I'm close, even if I missed him. Before, he had nothing to worry about; he was nobody. Now he's on a list—he's got to worry! If he's going to plant that bomb, he's got to plant it quick—the quicker the better. And he isn't at his home."

"What does that mean? He could—"

"To me it means he's in the store. I'm coming in."

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"But why?" Gabrino protested. "I've got an army, I tell you—"

"But I know his face!" Barry said.

The corridors were crowded. Like sheep awaiting slaughter, Barry thought bitterly. He went straight into Cramer's office, without pausing to ask his secretary's permission.

John Cramer turned away from a window as Barry entered. "Strand!" His face tightened. "What is this?"

The small man's voice was not sharp, clear, and cold, as it usually was. Sleeplessness and worry and strain had scarred him. His face was gaunt, his eyes over-bright.

"An emergency," Barry said. "I need your authority."

As quickly as possible, he gave Cramer the information he had about Clark. Cramer was angrily sceptical at first—he'd heard about Ulrich too—but he could not refuse to act when Barry pointed out that every possibility had to be covered. And half measures were unknown to the man.

"I'll clear the store." He reached for the telephone.

"No, for the love of heaven!" Barry said.

Cramer stared, unbelievingly. "I don't trust your judgment very much, Strand, if at all. But I won't take needless risk with human lives. If you think—"

"Mr. Cramer," Barry said, "we can keep people out if we give them some excuse, like an unexpected alarm from the fire department, but we can't do anything with the people inside the store except let them go home as they will. You certainly can't clear them."

"Why not? If there's danger—"

"Mr. Cramer!" Barry pleaded. "Once the order is given out; once that first woman screams—and some woman will scream—there'll be a panic like nothing in the world before. They'll pile up at the lifts, on the stairs, at the doors—they'll kill themselves by the score. You know they will."

Cramer knew it; his face went paper-white. "Lord, have mercy!"

"Yes," Barry said. "Now I'll see about Roy Clark."

Perhaps it was because bad luck can't go on for ever. Or perhaps, because of Cramer's prayer, Providence did intervene. Whatever the reason—a hand seemed to lead Barry directly to Roy Clark.

Clark's hat, his coat, the shape of his back, did not distinguish him at all from several other men looking at socks in Men's Outfitting. But Men's Outfitting was only the third department in which Barry looked; Clark's shoulder was the first to feel the touch of Barry's hand.

"By all that's holy," Barry said, "I've got you now."

"I—I don't know what you mean," Clark stuttered, and his sick look of fear made that a lie. "Let go of my arm, sir! There's some mistake." The other customers were taking notice; he appealed to them. "Gentlemen, help me—"

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"Store security!" Barry said, and showed his badge. "This man is a wanted thief, a shoplifter." His hand was like an iron claw fastened on Clark's upper arm. "Go on with your shopping, please." He took Clark out of the group and to the stairs. There were excited voices behind him, but no alarm. He took Clark up to his office.

Once inside, once the door was closed and the sounds shut in, Barry turned Clark to face him, and the back of Barry's hand slapped Clark across the face hard, and then hard again. Clark squealed in pain, tears bursting from his eyes.

Gabrino came round his desk like a furious bear. He tied up Barry's arms in a bear's grip.

"That's enough!"

He tore Barry away from Clark. DeRose, a plain-clothes man who'd been talking to Gabrino, caught and held Clark. The blind fury left Barry, leaving only cold fury in its place.

"This is Clark," he said. "This is the man who planted the bomb. He owns the voice I've been hearing on the telephone, and I don't need the accent to know it. Four years ago, when I was in the force, this guy reported a stolen car. I talked to him then. He had no accent then, and he has none now, but he can fake one."

Clark said, "You lie!"

Roy Clark was put in a chair. Barry, Gabrino, DeRose, and two other detectives began to question him. Clark was frightened at first. Then a measure of confidence came to him. His mouth firmed up, and his eyes sharpened. He denied everything over and over again.

"You're not this kind of a fool," Barry said. "I'd expect you to lie if there was a chance you could make the lie stick. But there isn't a chance. My testimony will convict you, and the shotgun shells, and all the rest you know the police will find in your basement —and you've had it! Why make a fool of yourself? Why don't you make a clean breast of it? You've nothing to lose."

Thoughtfully, trying to control a small smile, Clark said, "You have a point, Strand. A very logical point. I have nothing to lose. So—" he shrugged his narrow shoulders—"I will confess. I'm your man."

Gabrino said, "Well, now! Tell us about it, Mr. Clark."

"I approached the problem with considerable—"

"Just a moment!" Barry said. "Clark, you told me you made a second bomb—a bigger one. I didn't find it in your basement. Where is it?"

Clark stared at Barry, eyes shining. Then he made a nervous sound, thin, high-pitched, almost a giggle. "Wouldn't you like to know?" he said.

"I would," Barry told him.

"I'll tell you this much, Strand," Clark said. "It's in the store, hidden away, just as I promised you. It has a timing mechanism." He looked at his wristwatch.

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" It will explode very soon now."

" *Where is it?* "

" I won't tell you," Clark said. " Somewhere in the store—that's all I'll say. A parcel, just like a thousand others." He began to smile as he became aware of his power, of the dramatic situation he controlled. " I alone know where it is and I won't tell you. You have the whole store to search, and you don't know how much time you have." He looked at his watch again. " I assure you, there's very little."

A gasp from Gabrino jerked Barry's eyes that way. Gabrino's face wore the stunned, agonised look of a man who has been shot in the stomach. He turned almost blindly, and lurched from the office.

" Clark, don't be a fool! " Barry said. " You've only a prison term ahead of you now. Do you want to die . . . ? "

" They don't execute the insane," Clark said. " And I'm not sane—I'm not at all sane."

" Sane enough! "

" No." Clark shook his head. " I'm afraid not."

Barry went after Gabrino, closing the door behind him. Gabrino had frightened the wits out of the young girl who had taken Clancy's place in the outer office. And she was frightened with cause.

Gabrino was leaning on her desk, barely able to hold himself erect, face sagging and grey.

" Barry! " he said hoarsely. " Is he telling the truth? "

Almost as sick, Barry said, " I'm afraid he is."

" Will he let it go all the way? "

" I don't know," Barry said. " He's got us on our knees. Reason doesn't mean a thing to him. He doesn't care how many people die."

" What am I going to do? " Gabrino struggled with his breathing. " I could get it out of him in time, but I don't know how much time there is."

Gabrino jerked suddenly erect. " I've got to clear the store! "

" No! " Barry caught Gabrino's arm. " You'll panic them and they'll stampede. You might kill a hundred."

Gabrino stared at Barry. " You're right. But I've got to do something! "

Barry turned away, beating a hard fist into his palm. " Where is the bomb? Where would he plant it? Where would he have to plant it? "

" How would I know? Anywhere. On any floor from the roof to the basement, in any department, behind any counter."

" We can narrow it down. We've got to."

" Tell me how," Gabrino said.

" Not Women's Wear—a man would be conspicuous. Not Furniture—so few people go there, he might be remembered. That's the clue. He knows the place is loaded with police. He'd be very careful." Barry's lean face was taut, sweating. " The fourth

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floor is Shoes—nobody would notice an extra box. Or the basement—that's always crowded."

"Why did they have to civilise cops?" Gabrino asked. "If I could use my hands on him for just five minutes!"

Barry's eyes were on Gabrino.

"I found him in Men's Outfitting. We can eliminate that department. He wouldn't hang around an area where he'd left the bomb."

"Barry, you can't hope to find it!"

Suddenly Barry said, "Give me that weasel! Let me take him with me."

"I can't let you."

"I'm not going to beat him," Barry said. "I'm going to use him. He's yellow; rotten yellow clear through. He'll be afraid of that bomb if he thinks it's going to blow him in pieces."

"Where will you take him?"

"One place at a time." Barry's voice was jarring. "How else can I do it?" He hesitated a moment, torn with conflict. Then he said, "What can we do about the crowd? We can't put out a blanket order to clear at once, but d'you think we could thin the crowd a little? I mean talk to them a few at a time, walk them out, if necessary, then come back and get a few more? We can't just do nothing at all!"

"I guess I've got to try," Gabrino said.

For Clark, the hunt through the store began as a game, a child's game made completely adult by the aspect of violence.

He entered into the spirit of the thing. He walked between Barry Strand and DeRose, underplaying the role, amused, smiling. He did not concede the men even a small chance of finding the bomb in time. How could they in a store so vast, with places of concealment beyond number? So he could afford to be generous in a small degree and derive certain additional enjoyment from the gesture.

"Gentlemen, may I say you are cold? You would get warmer as you climbed."

Barry's eyes met DeRose's. Whatever the pleasure Clark got from the gesture, they were grateful. If he was guiding them right—and they had no choice but to accept every small help—Clark had just eliminated the entire basement. They went upstairs at once.

Barry said, "You made the whole bomb yourself, Clark? Including the timer?"

"I most certainly did," Clark said. He lifted his amused eyes. "If you're trying to trap me into disclosing the fact that it's a ticking mechanism that might be heard, I'll save you the trouble. It's completely silent, an acid fuse. When the acid eats through the material of the trigger retainer, the trigger will be released and the bomb will explode."

"How long does that take?"

"Depends on the acid and the material," Clark said.

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"That's right," Barry said. "And there isn't a man alive who can say how long it will take a certain acid to eat through a certain material under all conditions. You can't know within half an hour when the bomb will explode."

"I tested it thoroughly. It was accurate within five minutes four times in succession. I assure you—"

"There were temperature changes," Barry said quietly. "Carrying it in, there was a lot of movement, a lot of stirring of the acid. Fresh acid all the time on the material. These things could mean an hour's difference. Isn't that right, Clark, now that you think about it? The bomb can go off any time. It can go off as we walk by."

"I know when it will explode," Clark insisted.

Barry had caught a note of uncertainty in Clark's voice, and so had DeRose. They worked on it quietly as they moved about the store, increasing that uncertainty, changing it slowly to fear.

And they watched Clark's face closely. It was a transparent face; doubt concerning the timing device was clear. Fear, then, fear of being hurt in a premature blast would show as clearly. As long as there was no fear, an area could be called safe, and in this way they eliminated area after area with some speed.

The police were busy thinning the crowd. Barry saw them working with such care that only an eye as concerned as his would be aware of the fact. But one loud noise, Barry thought. The sight of a youngster running, a foolish woman's scream—

Gabrino followed Barry and Clark and DeRose at a distance, going with them from floor to floor. Behind him, half a dozen of his staff, men and women, were moving as he moved, stopping as he stopped. They were the shock troops, ready to act in case panic flared, ready to clear an area at Gabrino's signal. They might be given only a few moments in which to work, and the chances were very good that more police than customers would die in the explosion.

Barry felt a new tension in Clark's arm as they reached the fifth floor, and he saw that Clark's smile had become a little fixed. This was the television department. There was row upon row of sets in operation, and many people standing about watching the programmes. A man could loiter here without being noticed and leave a parcel. But apart from wetting his lips several times, Clark showed no real concern.

They went on. Refrigerators, washing-machines, kitchen ranges, and similar items were sold on this floor. A bookshop used a large area, luggage another. They went through them all without an important reaction from Clark. They took the moving stairs to the next floor.

Clark's tension increased again. At least, it seemed to Barry that it did. And then he wondered. Was it only his own tension? Certainly he was strung as tight as a man could be without breaking. His face was sweating.

"Play it safe," he said to Clark. "Come clean now and save

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yourself. We're getting closer all the time. If you don't get blown to bits, you'll be trampled to death in the mob."

"You've passed it," Clark said. "It's below us."

That was a lie, clearly. Clark's smile was gone now, his lips were bloodless. Barry and DeRose led him through the Sports department. Each step seemed to increase Clark's tension. But he seemed not to be concerned about the present area, but on some area still ahead. Desperately, almost frantic, Barry looked at the signs that marked each department on this floor, trying to find one more promising than another. Kitchen Supplies, China, Ironmongery, Garden Supplies, Home Workshop—

"That's it!" Barry said. "Damn it! I should have come here first." He turned on Clark. "I'm right, Clark. It's the Home Workshop department, isn't it? You've bought enough things there. You know it well. A man like you wouldn't be noticed. You could leave a parcel there."

Clark's face was stiff, frozen.

"You've got it!" DeRose said. He took one of Clark's arms. Barry tightened his grip on the other, and they took Clark straight into the heart of the Home Workshop department. There were perhaps fifteen customers in the immediate area and three very busy assistants. Several of the customers turned, mildly curious. Barry was all too aware of them.

He whispered to Clark, "Where is it?"

Clark was unable to answer.

"It's here," DeRose whispered. "He's going like a Geiger counter. Barry, these people—"

"Yes."

Barry signalled Gabrino. Gabrino and his people acted at once, with haste but with infinite care. The police were clearing the department, smoothly, quietly. In a very few moments, there was no customer and no assistant within a hundred feet of the counter. And the circle was widening, the floor emptying, as the people went downstairs. Panic? There was none.

"You, too," Barry said to DeRose, and DeRose withdrew.

"Now it's just you and me," Barry said to Clark. "And I promise you, Clark, that we'll stay here until it happens."

"Let me go," Clark said hoarsely.

"I will not!" Barry said savagely. "You tell me where that bomb is, or you'll die here! Tell me now!"

Hysteria defeated him. Clark went out of his mind. Gabbling incoherently, the small man began to fight, twisting and squirming with a maniac's strength. Barry could not hurt him; to hold him in this condition was a waste, and Gabrino was coming towards them. A shove sent Clark stumbling into Gabrino's arms. Barry turned back to hunt furiously for the bomb, among parcels it would have taken hours even to count.

"Barry!" Gabrino said. "Leave it, you fool!"

Barry didn't hear him. He didn't see Gabrino pass Clark on to DeRose, and scarcely felt Gabrino's hands upon him. He had

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been living with the fact of the bomb, hunting it, in a sense, for so long he couldn't stop now. He shook free of Gabrino and kept digging through the parcels. In a moment a great flash of light burst behind his eyes. He felt no pain—

"I tell you, he's going to be all right!" Gabrino's voice was harsh and worried and blustering. "I know how to knock a man out. I didn't hit him hard. He's out cold, that's all."

Barry couldn't move. He felt as if an enormous weight were pressing down upon him. His throat was closed, silent, and dust-dry. There was an unholy ache in his head.

Dr. Whitney said, "You could have cracked his skull!"

"I didn't, did I?"

Barry tried very hard and said, "What about the bomb?"

"You see?" Gabrino said. "I told you." And then Gabrino leaned over Barry. "It went off, my lad. About two minutes after I clipped you. And you can thank me for that; you'd be a stretcher case if I hadn't. That was a lot of bomb!"

Barry pushed Dr. Whitney's hands away and sat up. "Was anyone hurt?"

"A few nicks, a few bruises," Gabrino said. "A woman twists her ankle, a kid falls down the stairs—that's about the size of it. But the department's a wreck, believe me!"

Barry fell back and closed his eyes. "Thank you, Lord," he whispered.

Brusquely Dr. Whitney said, "If you people will please stand back, I'd like to let a little light into this pit of gloom . . . Barry, listen to me."

Barry opened his eyes. "Yes?"

"I've been trying half the day to get hold of you," Dr. Whitney said. "I wanted you to be with Clancy when I told her. She's going to see again, Barry. As well as ever in the left eye, something like fifty per cent in the right. She's waiting for you, Barry."

Barry sat up with a jerk. "Let's go and be with Clancy now," he said. His hand went to his wallet where he kept Clancy's engagement ring. "Paul," he said, "I want a car, to take me to Clancy."

"One coming right up," Gabrino said.

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 136

Across. 1, *Chinese Republic*. 9, *Theatre*. 10, *Sarcasm*. 11, *Roger*. 12, *Seneschal*. 14, *Insuring*. 16, *Lips*. 18, *Skid*. 19, *Hang fire*. 22, *Rock plant*. 23, *Lilac*. 24, *Left out*. 25, *Octagon*. 26, *Bolt from the blue*.

Down. 1, *Caterpillar*. 2, *Ice ages*. 3, *Eater*. 4, *Evensong*. 5, *Easing*. 6, *Unresting*. 7, *Loaches*. 8, *Cam*. 13, *Lactescence*. 15, *Rainproof*. 17, *Last Post*. 18, *Sackful*. 20, *Illegal*. 21, *Tattoo*. 23, *Lithe*. 24, *Lob*.

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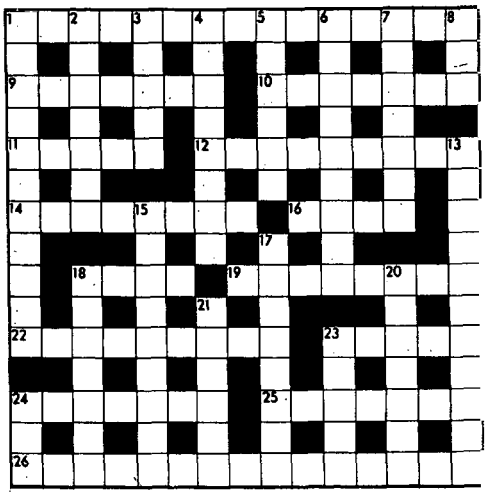

ACROSS

1 Oriental blend of yellow and red (7, 8).

9 There, at heart, is place of entertainment (7).

10 Scram as cheap sneers get round (7).

11 Has skull and cross-bones when jolly (5).

12 Castle vassal (9).

14 Guaranteeing mum against mixed gin's ruin (8).

16 They're smacked in anticipation (4).

18 A crazy mixed-up kid's slip (4).

19 Slow to go off (4, 4).

22 Sounds like a Stone Age shrub ! (4, 5).

23 Bengali lacks centre tree (5).

24 Bumpkin swallows newt and is omitted (4, 3).

25 Short month starts to form this shape (7).

26 Run away from sea? Most unexpected (4, 4, 3, 4).

DOWN

1 Provides food for support of grub (11).

2 Days of the Cold War? (3, 4).

3 " A knave; a rascal; an —— of broken meats " (*King Lear*) (5).

4 Just a song at twilight? (8).

5 Relaxing—a sin, for example (6).

6 Perpetual motion (9).

7 Fishes behold pains (7).

8 Upside down, the waterproof produces a river (3).

13 Milkiness tracked down by an Eccles 'tec (11).

15 They're dry and poor in the R.A.F. (9).

17 End of the fence—or the day (4, 4).

18 Swag and swig (7).

20 Against the law so sick Gael is upset (7).

21 Like beauty, it's only skin deep (6).

23 Fired, he becomes supple (5).

24 High ball in court, but not at the Bar (3).

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